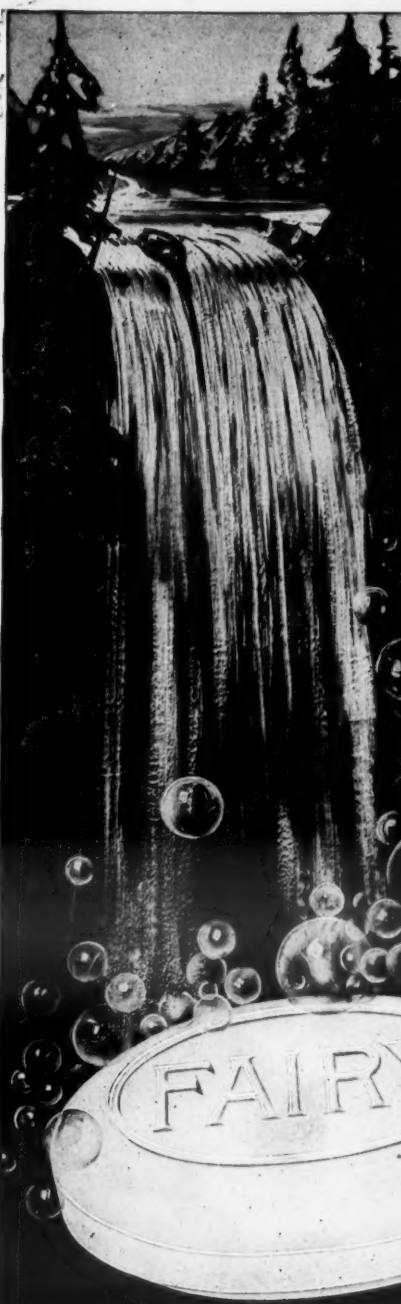


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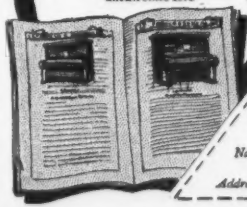
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AINSLÉE'S

VOL. XXXVIII.

AUGUST, 1916.

No. 1.



Filling His Own Shoes

By Henry C. Rowland

Author of "Downstairs," "Auld Jeremiah," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE piercing notes of the porcelain mender's pipe shrilled out from down the street, and Ruggles stretched, yawned, and ran his fingers through his mop of yellow hair, with the disagreeable duty sense of a sleepy soldier on hearing the first echoes of the reveille.

The vender of watercress had passed twenty minutes before, and his melodious howl had prepared Ruggles for his own particular summons. No need for alarm clocks in Paris! On working days, the chair mender announced the dreary fact that it was time to rise and shine; on Sundays Ruggles usually waited for the cress seller; but on holidays for the spending of which he had made no especial plans he was wont to repose himself up to the advent of the porcelain man and his pipe.

Now, as he sat up in bed and observed the patch of vivid blue sky through his wide-opened window, he was inclined to regret his sloth. It was a fête day, and the weather perfect, so far as he could see for the impending roofs. The heavy clouds of the evening before had been urged away by the "little north wind" so dear to the

hearts of French picnickers, and the sun was softly brilliant. Ruggles sprang from his bed and, going to the window, filled his lungs with the sweet spring air.

"Some day!" said he to himself. "Me for the road. I'll get on the wheel and pike off up the Marne. It must be fine up there now."

He pulled a round tin bathtub from under the bed, peeled off his pajamas, and, filling a big bath sponge, proceeded to stimulate his circulation to the accompaniment of song, for the water was so cold as to induce vocalism. Thus at his ablutions, Ruggles would have pleased Praxiteles or Michelangelo, who might have immortalized the youthful symmetry of his well-knit figure in a Hermes or son of Laocoön.

Of medium height and physical proportions in perfect accord with his twenty-three years, Ruggles could have posed to the credit of any young demigod. His face, too, was in keeping with his body, with its clear, well-spaced blue eyes, short, straight nose, mirthful mouth, and resolute chin. He was a handsome youngster, not only in feature, but in expression, and his wavy yellow hair, which showed cop-

per tones in certain lights, had put romantic ideas in the pretty head of many a *midinette* who happened to pass him on the boulevards.

But Ruggles had no answering eye for *midinettes*. His allegiance had been early given to one whose numerous portraits, cut from various illustrated papers, comprised the sole decoration of the bare walls of his little mansard room. Ruggles had never seen the original of these, nor was his adoration more than that of the liege subject for his princess. But the remote ideal had so far triumphed over the present real as to have made Ruggles indifferent to such charms as were offered in comparison to those of his ivory-towered goddess.

He finished his bath and proceeded to dress for his holiday on the road. His costume was simple, but effective—a loose-fitting bicycle suit of light-gray worsted, the coat unlined and of a Norfolk cut, with stockings to match and gray buckskin shoes lacing from the toes. Fully equipped, he had the appearance of an English or American undergraduate off for a Continental holiday. He spoke good colloquial French, which added to the impression that he was a young fellow who had enjoyed educational advantages.

Three or four hours later found Ruggles pedaling blithely along the towpath of the pretty Marne. The day was perfect. The forested hillsides glowed with the delicate purple of mounting sap beneath a billowy, greenish cloud of tender foliage, while the lush pastures were smeared with the golden yellow of primrose, wild mustard, and dandelion.

Riding cheerily on, Ruggles lent his mind to romantic fancies inspired by his surroundings.

It was five hundred years ago, and he, a knight in shining armor, was ambling down the bank of that twisting

stream astride a great charger with arched neck and blood-red nostrils. Then down from the wooded slopes to dispute his passage came a grim mailed figure with black, waving plumes and visor closed, to wait like some equestrian figure wrought in iron, silent and sinister, the bright sun shimmering on his burnished helmet and emblazoned shield. Ruggles recognized him at once from his device—le Sieur Morgaunt de la Marne, a robber baron of ill repute, a pillager and ravisher, in the dungeons of whose castle back there in the forest languished many a wretched victim.

There could be no parley with such a miscreant. Ruggles' mailed hand rose to his visor, his lance was laid at rest. "Have at you, Sir Robber!" The hoofs of his great war horse ground in the shale as, scenting the fray, it sprang forward with a snort of eagerness. Ruggles lowered his head and began to pedal furiously. The next instant he spun beneath an arched bridge and around a bend, where he pitched upon a tableau that went far to dampen his knightly ardor.

Standing with her back to an easel was a slender girl with a pallid face, a palette hanging from her thumb, and her finger closed upon a paintbrush. Before her stood two lusty vagabonds in baggy corduroy trousers caught about their waists by soiled sashes of red flannel and with stout cudgels in their thick, grimy paws. The group was on the edge of a steep bank which dropped precipitously for ten feet into the dark-green, eddying water. It looked as if the girl had backed away and the tramps had followed her.

Ruggles was no coward, but the situation shot him through with a sudden chill. Like most people who live in France and read the daily press of that country, he had not the slightest desire in the world for an encounter with

French footpads or any of their ilk. In this he is scarcely to be blamed, since he realized, as must all people who are acquainted with the French bandit, that, once departed on an act of violence, he has no idea of where to stop. At violence of any kind he seems to develop an insensate fury to which there is no control, and the results are often of indescribable horror. Ruggles read *Le Petit Parisien* and other sensational journals, and was quite aware with what sort of a situation he had to deal.

Nevertheless, he braked, dismounted, and let his bicycle fall upon its side; then turned to the girl a face nearly as pale as her own. He saw at a glance that she was English, not only from the pure Anglo-Saxon type of her blanched face, but from her dress. Besides, the fact of her being quite alone in so isolated a spot showed that she could not possibly be French. The two young thugs had not changed their positions at Ruggles' approach; they gave him a sullen look, then muttered something that Ruggles could not understand.

"What do they want?" asked Ruggles, in English, of the girl.

"They—they want my purse," she answered unsteadily. "I gave them a franc each to buy some food, but when I opened my purse, they saw a twenty-franc piece—and now they want that. Perhaps I'd better give it to them."

Ruggles looked at the tramps. Both were young men, not more than twenty at most, swarthy of feature and with the heavy, clumsy strength of a certain type of French peasant. They seemed little more than brute beasts, and in all probability were for the moment far more dangerous, as even tigers and hyenas do not inflame their savage blood with absinth and marc. Ruggles, watching them warily, saw what was coming—or, at least, what was being planned in the slow-witted, perverted brains—a crashing blow on the head for

him; then some crime indescribably horrid.

But he did not wait for this dénouement. The pair were almost on the edge of the bank, not six feet from where he stood, and before their dulled faculties had time to realize that the occasion called for defensive, rather than offensive, action, they found themselves splashing into the swirling river; one with his front teeth badly loosened and the other blinking and cursing and wondering what had happened to his right eye.

The water was only shoulder deep, and Ruggles, seeing that they were in no danger of being drowned, spun about and grabbed the girl by the elbow.

"Can you ride a bike?" he gasped.

"Yes."

"Then jump on mine and beat it. I'll follow with your stuff."

He grabbed up the bicycle and held it while she mounted; then ran a few steps and gave her a vigorous push. She started off, wabbling dangerously close to the edge of the bank; then found her pedals and straightened her course. As Ruggles turned, he saw a shock head thrusting itself above the rim of sward, and without pausing to reflect that he might be destroying a masterpiece, he grabbed up the easel, canvas and all, and smote. The head disappeared, with another splash from below. Ruggles seized the paint box and, forsaking the easel, which was merely a flimsy five-franc affair, took to his heels in pursuit of the girl, who had already skimmed under the old stone-arched bridge and was out of sight around the bend.

But this panic of hers was of short duration, and Ruggles came on her a moment later standing beside the bicycle and looking back fearfully.

"Are they coming?" she asked breathlessly.

"I don't believe so," he answered. "I guess the ducking cooled 'em off. We'd better keep on, though."

"Do you think they could have drowned?" she asked. "The river was deep right under the bank."

"Oh, they're all right," he answered. "I looked over and saw them hanging onto the bushes. One of them started to climb up, and I swiped him over the head with the easel. I'm sorry, but your picture fell into the river."

"Never mind the picture. Let's hurry on. I say, it *was* plucky of you! Such horrid beasts!" She gave a little shiver. "I fancy it would have been all up with me if you hadn't come along just then."

"Oh, they may have been just trying to bluff you into giving up your purse," said Ruggles, though he had his doubts on this score.

He took the bicycle by the handlebars, and they started to walk on rapidly, with occasional backward glances. The girl had recovered herself and, though still rather pale, was entirely self-possessed.

She told Ruggles that while she had been making a study of the river, the two tramps had come along the towpath and, after pausing for a few moments and making some flattering remarks about the sketch, had informed her that they were making their way back to Paris from Epernay, where they had gone hoping to find work. But there had been no work to be had, and they were penniless and hungry and in need of shoes. She had given them a franc apiece, saying that that was all she could spare, but unfortunately they had caught sight of the money in her purse and it had aroused their cupidity. When Ruggles had arrived on the scene, one of the tramps had been saying to the other that a person might easily fall into the river and drown, just at that point, and nobody be the wiser.

"I was horribly frightened," she concluded, "and if you hadn't come at that

moment, I meant to jump into the river and try to swim across."

As she talked, Ruggles observed her with unobtrusive admiration, and he thought that he had never met a more charming girl. She was of little less than his own height, which was five feet nine, strongly, but gracefully shaped, with a smooth, broad forehead, dark chestnut hair, delicate features, and slaty-gray eyes fringed by long, dark lashes. Everything about her pleased him exceedingly.

Finding that they were not pursued, they slackened their pace.

"Are you doing a bicycle tour?" asked the girl, glancing at the water-proof bundle on the handlebars.

"No. Just a little spin for the day. I'm in business in Paris. Been there for the last three years. My name is Ruggles."

"Mine is Darthea Westbrooke," she answered, and Ruggles thought the name precisely fitted her. "I live in Paris, too, with my aunt, Miss Challand. We're stopping for a few days at this little village on ahead. I'm studying art, and I wanted to make some sketches of the river. We come out here quite often in the summer. Here's auntie now."

Ruggles had already seen approaching them a woman with a tall and rather angular figure, who walked with a swinging, masculine stride, the speed of which increased as she discovered her niece strolling along in company with an entirely strange young man. She bore down upon the couple like an osprey on a brace of young and downy ducks, and Ruggles observed that her features were high and, at that particular moment, severe.

"Suppose you thought I was never coming, my dear," said Miss Challand, and stared questioningly at Ruggles.

"This is Mr. Ruggles, auntie," said Darthea, and added to Ruggles, "My aunt, Miss Challand."

Miss Challand returned Ruggles' bow with a brief nod, and the austerity of her face did not soften. Darthea quickly smoothed the situation. In a few brief words she described what had just occurred, and, having the artistic temperament, she may possibly have exaggerated the heroism of her rescue, quite omitting the precipitate retreat of the rescuer. Ruggles, listening modestly, was impressed by the fact that perhaps he was more of a hero than he had realized. Whether true or not, it was certainly gratifying to hear Darthea's glowing version of the affair, while the gradual softening that overspread Miss Challand's austere features was if anything even more flattering. Then, much to his surprise, he discovered that the aquamarine eyes of the spinster were filling with tears, and that her fallow skin held a warm flush. At the conclusion of the brief narrative, she took a stride forward and gave him a grip of the hand that might have made him wince, had he been of the wincing sort.

"Good for you!" said Miss Challand huskily. "Mercy, what an escape! All my fault for letting the child go off alone. We ought to inform the gendarmes immediately."

"Oh, I don't think I'd do that if I were you," said Ruggles. "They'd haul 'em up before the *juge de paix*, and we'd have to hang around and give evidence, and then they'd let 'em off with a warning. I guess they've had their lesson."

"Well, perhaps you're right," admitted Miss Challand; then glanced at a small, cheap watch on her bony wrist. "It's nearly twelve. Can't you come and have *déjeuner* with us, Mr. Ruggles? We're stopping at the little hotel on the river, and there's usually a *friture de la Marne* and an omelet and a salad and cold meats and things."

"Thank you, I should enjoy it very much," said Ruggles.

CHAPTER II.

The Paris branch of the great Walkeasy Shoe Company of America was, like all of the company's retail stores, a splendidly stocked and handsomely furnished establishment which did a steady and profitable business and was the despair of the local trade. It was situated on a prominent boulevard in the heart of the city, and there was seldom a space of five minutes in the day when its handsome plate-glass doors were not swinging open to welcome the coming or to speed the parting customer.

The Walkeasy Company was naturally very proud of its handsome retail stores, and the managers of these stores were in turn proud of their various equipments and the high-class character of their personnel. In the Paris branch there were seven salesmen in the gentlemen's department and four saleswomen upstairs in the ladies'. Of the male clerks, two were Americans, two French, one English, one German, and one a Spaniard. Of the Americans, one was Ruggles.

Ruggles prided himself on being a good retail salesman of the best shoes on the market, and it was a matter of gratification to him that his tact and delicacy were of such a quality that the most modest of lady clients never objected to his fitting their delicate ankles even with high gaiters, if they were in a hurry and the saleswomen were all busy. It had never occurred to him that there might be a double reason for this, one being the wholesomeness of his open, boyish face and the other the fact that they regarded him and his shoehorn in precisely the same impersonal light.

So far as his immediate forbears were concerned, Ruggles had really no legitimate quarrel with his place in the world. His father had been with the Walkeasy Company as foreman ever

since its incorporation. Being of an inventive mind, he had evolved some highly valuable machines for stretching and stitching calfskin. Any one of the elder Ruggles' inventions, if properly handled, might have brought him a small fortune. As it was, they had been appropriated by the company, which in compensation had slightly increased his salary, but had paid him no royalties. Unfortunately, Ruggles, while a clever inventor, had been a poor business man, and when he had died suddenly of pneumonia, it had been found that his savings were all invested in worthless paper. Ruggles' mother had died when he was twelve years old.

So Ruggles, junior, had been left penniless on finishing school, and, following hereditary instinct, had gone first into the factory and afterward into the retail service of the company. He liked the business and was at this time full of ambitious dreams, for it had been hinted to him that if his success in selling shoes were to continue on the same high plane, he might before long be promoted to the managership of a new retail shop which there was some talk of opening in Vienna.

Ruggles, it must be understood, was really and sincerely proud of the great industrial machine of which he was so small a working part. It seemed to him a magnificent achievement for an American concern to enter into successful competition with the trade of Europe and beat it on its own ground. The splendidly equipped retail stores in Paris and London and other cities suggested, in a way, the powerful outposts of an invading army, carrying as they did the American ensign far and wide and compelling admiration for American enterprise and commercial daring. Ruggles had lofty visions of the day to come when, these outposts pushing farther and farther into the East, the sun would never set on

the flag of the Walkeasy Shoe Company; when, no matter what the hour, in some part of the world the doors of the company would be open to customers. And he, Ruggles, might be commandant of one of these depots, jealously guarding the interests of the great organization and defying the attacks of foreign trade rivals. It was an inspiring thought.

The morning following Ruggles' adventure on the Marne passed in its usual well-ordered manner, and, the noon hour arriving, Monsieur Durand, the manager, went out for his déjeuner. In the absence of Durand, Ruggles, as senior salesman, was in charge of the shop.

It was the slack hour, and Ruggles was looking out upon the traffic flowing up and down the boulevard when a big, heavy limousine of American make drew silently up to the curb and there descended a handsome young giant with a fresh skin and the hall mark of his nationality stamped most legibly upon him. Ruggles had a good look at him as he stepped down from the car, and his vigorous young heart went off with the whirl of a motor when the clutch is suddenly released with the gas turned on full. He recognized that strong, good-humored face with its heavy forehead, high-bridged nose, masterful jaw, and dark, deep-set eyes. At a single glance, it proclaimed the young man as Richard P. Downing, junior, the illustrious son of an illustrious father, which latter was none other than the president and principal stockholder of the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America.

In his honest heart, Ruggles was a good deal of a hero worshiper, and the Downings, father and son, were his most favored idols. He had followed with the keenest interest the career of Dick Downing at Yale, rejoicing at his numerous successes—which, it must be admitted, had been rather athletic and

social than intellectual—and condoning his few failures as due to a lack of proper support on the part of those whom he had striven so hard to lead to victory.

This brilliant epoch at an end, Dick had buckled down to work like a sturdy colt which, after having kicked up its heels in the pasture for a term, is not too proud to throw its neck into the collar. He had started in to find out how shoes were made, and had helped to make them, working shoulder to shoulder with the operatives in the factory and swamping prejudice with the overflow of his big, kindly nature until he had undergone a sort of apotheosis and become the factory deity. He had interested himself in the conditions of the employees and bettered those conditions with never so much as the faintest hint of patronage. Instead of devoting his attention to the perfection of labor-saving devices, he had devised means for the saving of labor as represented in his toiling fellow men and women, and the result had proved more profitable than the invention of soulless machines could possibly have been. It must be admitted, however, that the profits had not accrued solely to the company. Several thousands of human beings who worked for the company had been likewise benefited.

But Ruggles' adoration of this demigod was not based solely on such impersonal tenets as these. While employed in one of the New York retail stores, he had one day come into personal relations with Dick Downing, who had dropped in to buy a pair of shoes. Ruggles, who had waited on him, had been shocked to observe that he was shod in footwear of an alien brand. Worse than that, they were the shoes of a sharp business rival. Discovered thus in sin by the ingenuous Ruggles, Dick had laughed.

"The proof of the pudding's in the eating, old chap," he had said to Ruggles.

"Don't give me away. I wanted to satisfy myself how they compared with ours. They're punk!" And he had paid his bill, shaken Ruggles warmly by the hand, and departed, with nobody in the place the wiser.

But now, as he stood quivering at the door, an even greater shock was in store for Ruggles. Dick, having descended, turned and held out his hand to assist a lady to alight, and as Ruggles stared fascinated, he saw that this transcendent vision of loveliness was the pulsating original of the portraits tacked about the walls of his little Passy abode. It was actually Ruth Downing, the only daughter of Richard P. Downing and the sister of Dick. Ruggles had a sensation as of a great many small white mice scrambling up his spine.

But in spite of this Olympian invasion, he did not lose his head. Everything was in order for the visitation of the heaven-born, and Ruggles was conscious of a soul-searching exultation that the honors of the reception were to devolve upon him and not upon Durand. The much bebuttoned boy whose duty it was to tend the doors had scampered off to lunch, so Ruggles opened the doors and waited.

The two Olympians did not immediately enter. They paused to examine the display of samples in the window and, so far as Ruggles could ascertain, seemed pleased with the exposition.

"Very latest models," he heard Dick say, as he bent his Jovian brows on the display. "Good a show as I've seen in any of our shops, at home or over here."

Then they came in, those shining ones, and it seemed to Ruggles that they shed a glow. Perhaps they did, for it would have been hard to find their like in a search through many cities; the young man strong, dominant, and kindly, with the features and body

of a youthful Vulcan; the girl sweet and thoughtful of face, with very dark-blue eyes, a nose made seductive by the suggestion of an upward tilt, a full-lipped, mirthful mouth, and a chin like her brother's, though without the cleft—or at least with no more than a suspicion of it. Aside from this feature, there was slight family resemblance between the two. Dick Downing reverted to the pioneer type of his American ancestors in his bold features and powerful frame, while his sister inherited her lithe, supple figure from their mother, the granddaughter of an Irish earl whose son had emigrated to California in the days of '49. Ruth looked a child beside her big, deep-chested brother and might easily have passed for his daughter, although he was but seven years her senior. Ruth was just turned twenty.

Brother and sister were of the finest type a nation can produce. They were the wholesome, industrious children of strong, hard-working parents.

Ruggles stepped back as they entered, his face quite pale from sheer excitement and his eyes very bright and round. He looked like a mere boy. Dick Downing glanced at him with a sudden flash of recognition which gave to his big features, harsh in repose, a strikingly pleasant expression.

"Hello!" said he. "So you're over here, are you? Remember me?" And he thrust out a hand that might have throttled a bear.

"I certainly do, sir," Ruggles answered, meeting the firm clasp. "You're Dick—I mean—"

"That's right." A laugh rumbled in the chest of the young giant. "I'm Dick Downing. How long have you been here in Paris?" He turned to his sister. "Ruth, this is Mr. Ruggles, who used to be in the Twenty-third Street store."

Ruggles, flushing with delight at being thus remembered, took the gloved

little hand that was offered him and managed to mumble something in response to the girl's kindly greeting. But he did not lose his head, for the simple reason that it was not a part of his nature so to do. He was thinking not of himself, but of what splendid people these were, and how glad he was to see and talk to them. He was like a little child meeting strangers for whom it conceives a sudden and violent affection. Had he been fourteen years younger, he would have proceeded immediately to show them all his toys.

But aroused to the sense of his responsibilities, he said to Dick:

"I'm sorry, sir, but our manager, Mr. Durand, has just gone out to lunch. If you'd like to see the store—"

"Oh, that'll have to wait," said Dick smilingly. "Our call is not official. We want some shoes. You see, we're off on a flying tour to Switzerland and might want to do a little tramping around, and we've got nothing with us but light walking shoes. What have you in stock?" He shot a quick, appraising look about the store, then glanced at his sister. "Nice, isn't it, Ruth?"

"Perhaps Miss Downing might like to step upstairs to the ladies' department," Ruggles suggested.

"Thanks, I won't bother, now that I'm here," Ruth answered, smiling. "I can tell you precisely what I want, and it's bound to fit, because the shape was got out from a plaster cast of my own foot."

She gave the necessary data to Ruggles, who fled away to secure the desired article. A moment later, when he returned, Dick was chatting pleasantly with the cashier, to whom he had introduced himself and who appeared to be in that state of self-possessed embarrassment peculiar to a Frenchman when in conversation with one representing the powers that be. The sales-

men present appeared to have gathered the fact that the shop was entertaining exalted personalities and had spread the information to the floor above, where the pretty French saleswomen were peeping over the balcony, examining Ruth through admiring eyes.

But Ruggles was no more embarrassed than might have been a high priest officiating before the shrine of a patron saint. If his fingers trembled a little as he slipped off the little shoes, it was from pure devotional exaltation. He guided the slim, shapely little foot into the high walking boot with the skill of an orthopedic surgeon fitting an artificial limb, and was rejoiced, but not surprised, to find that the adaptation was perfect. The wonderfully accurate machinery of the Walkeasy factory had followed those perfect contours to the fraction of a millimeter. The shoe fitted as if cast upon its model.

"Leave them on, please," said she. "They fit perfectly and are just the thing for the road. We're off for Vichy this very minute. Oh, and I'd like some trees, of course, and half a dozen pairs of silk stockings—those new, reinforced ones, if you've got them in stock. Dick and I will probably do a lot of tramping about."

Ruggles ran up to the ladies' department to secure these last necessities, and when he returned, one of the other salesmen was fitting Dick with a pair of heavy-soled walking boots. His wants were quickly supplied, and brother and sister left the shop with a friendly word of farewell to cashier and clerks. Ruggles followed them out to the car, and Ruth got in, but Dick, catching sight of a stationery shop across the street, was reminded that he wished to buy a fountain pen.

"How long have you been with the company, Mr. Ruggles?" Ruth asked, as they waited for Dick's return.

"Seven years, Miss Downing," he an-

swered. "My father worked for the old Golden West Shoe Company, which was taken over by the Walkeasy. We're a shoe family." He smiled.

"Just as we are," said Ruth. "Father started in the leather business, you know, and some day Dick will probably succeed him, and Dick's son succeed him, and so on through generations, I hope. A good business ought never to go out of a family, I think, even after its fortune is made." She regarded thoughtfully for a moment the handsome face with its fresh color and light, blue-gray eyes. "It seems to me," said she slowly, "that the company might give you something better than a salesman's position."

"Oh, I guess that'll come in time," said Ruggles cheerfully. "Promotions are slow with us, because everybody in the Walkeasy gets a square deal and sticks to his job. I draw top pay now for a salesman."

"You ought to, I'm sure," said the girl. "But there must be openings, as the business increases. I heard father say not long ago that they were planning to establish a new store in Vienna. Why don't you try for the manager-ship? Put in your application to the general European manager and get your own local manager to indorse it. Don't wait for the company to push you ahead. Companies don't do business that way. There's no harm in trying."

Ruggles, looking into the earnest violet eyes, was conscious of the rush of some new and very stirring emotion.

"You're mighty kind, Miss Downing," said he. "I guess I will. I've heard about that new Vienna store. Trouble is, though, I don't speak a word of German."

"Then get busy and learn it," said Ruth briskly. "You speak awfully good French. I heard you talking to the saleswomen upstairs, and your accent is perfect. I shouldn't say it, I

suppose, but, well—trying on shoes isn't the most—er—distinguished sort of work for a man."

"I never saw anything to be ashamed of about it," said Ruggles.

A little line of annoyance drew itself across Ruth's pretty forehead.

"Of course not," she answered, "but—well, all the same— Oh, all right, stick to it if you like it better." Her face grew slightly pink, and she drew back as her brother approached with his plunging stride.

"Well, good-by, old chap, and good luck," said he, shaking hands with Ruggles.

Ruth did not offer her hand, merely returning Ruggles' shopman's bow with a friendly nod. The big car glided quietly away and, after standing for a moment staring thoughtfully after it, Ruggles reentered the store.

CHAPTER III.

On returning to his room that evening, Ruggles spent a good half hour in serious and steady contemplation of his favorite portrait of Ruth Downing—a half-page reproduction of a photograph he had clipped from *Town and Country*, representing that charming girl in the act of serving in a tennis tournament.

"I guess she was sort of disappointed in me," mused Ruggles to himself. "She thinks I'm satisfied to go on for the rest of my life down on my knees with a shoehorn and a buttonhook, fitting shoes. Well, I'll show her!"

Thereupon he proceeded to compose a letter to the European general manager, stating his qualifications, recalling the faithfulness not only of his own service, but that of his father before him, and making his official application for the management of the new Vienna retail store. In this letter, he stated that he had mastered the French language sufficiently for all practical pur-

poses in six months' time—a pardonable exaggeration—and that having a natural gift for languages, he hoped to be able to accomplish as much with German, the study of which tongue he proposed to begin at once.

To this letter Ruggles had no difficulty in persuading Durand, his own immediate chief, to write a sufficiently commendatory indorsement. Durand had no friend or relative of his own eligible for the position, and Ruggles was the only member of his force whom he did not actually dislike or by whom he did not feel himself disliked in return. He was inclined to resent the fact that the honor of receiving the Downings had devolved on Ruggles and not upon himself, and showed a disposition to be disagreeable at not having been sent for posthaste on the arrival of the probable future president of the company and his sister. But on Ruggles' explanation that they were pressed for time, Durand was sufficiently mollified to write a perfectly fair indorsement, reflecting as he did so that if at any time in the immediate future he had occasion to be displeased with Ruggles, he could always send an unofficial letter stating that subsequent events had led him to believe that Ruggles was scarcely the man to fill the important position of local manager to the best interests of the company.

Before the end of the week, Ruggles received a courteous reply from the general European manager saying that his application had been duly received, approved, and forwarded with the proper indorsement to the home office. He was pleased, also, to commend Ruggles' ambition, and trusted that his years of faithful service might soon meet with their due reward, as the retail stores in Great Britain, France, and Italy had proved so successful that their was every prospect of establishing others in Austria and Switzerland within the coming year.

Then, as if the star of Ruggles' fortunes were at last to shine bright and clear through the dissipating mists of mediocrity, a vacancy in the office was filled by a new clerk who seemed to the boy sent directly by Providence to further his interests. This new man was a tall, gaunt Viennese, silent and spectacled, who spoke good French, Spanish, and Italian, but whose English was most indifferent. Learning that his colleague was eager to perfect himself in this tongue, Ruggles, who for lack of time and opportunity was making poor progress with his German, suggested that they exchange lessons, to which the Austrian, whose name was Lorenz, readily agreed.

Wherefore, the two forgathered as opportunity offered, whether in their own rooms or in rambles about the city. Herr Lorenz was not a particularly congenial companion, being gloomy and saturnine and often critical to the point of rudeness. Also, he was of a miserly disposition, and it was invariably Ruggles who paid the tram or bus fares, the coffee that they sipped in front of some café, or an occasional textbook. But Ruggles did not object. It is doubtful if he even noticed this peculiarity on the part of his fellow student.

Lorenz, however, proved an excellent teacher, and Ruggles made rapid progress. The conversations of the two were alternately in English and German, with French to fall back upon when either was at a loss. In the course of this association, Ruggles confided to Lorenz his motive for mastering the German tongue as quickly as possible, at which the Austrian asked a few pertinent questions in regard to Ruggles' reasons for being so sure that he stood in the direct line of promotion. On hearing the situation explained, with the buoyant optimism characteristic of his comrade, Lorenz became gloomily distraught for several

minutes. Following this period of distraction, he returned to his English with increased application. The next day he made himself disliked in the store by reason of certain fawning assiduities directed toward Durand, who, however, appeared to accept these attentions as his due. Thereafter he patronized Lorenz, but favored him.

Miss Challand had asked Ruggles to call, and Ruggles had done so, to find the two ladies installed in a tiny studio apartment on the gardens of the Luxembourg. He had already discovered, while lunching with them in their little hotel on the Marne, that they were very poor in this world's goods, for Miss Challand had mentioned their circumstances with the same indifference that one might use in speaking of a spell of bad weather. But it had been immediately evident to Ruggles, who had made a considerable study of human nature—as seen over the top of his shoehorn—that his new friends were ladies of birth and distinction whose poverty was in no way commensurate with their breeding and connections. Miss Challand was the niece of a lord bishop, and Darthea was the orphan daughter of the late Captain Westbrooke of the British army.

Ruggles, who liked and respected them both, wondered if perhaps he ought not to state frankly his own position in life. Had the opportunity offered, he might have done so, with perhaps the information that the company owed its present great success to the mechanical inventions of his father, but that, owing to this parent's lack of business ability, he, Ruggles, had been obliged to begin with a subordinate position and to work his way up. But as neither lady showed the slightest curiosity in regard to his personal affairs—they fearing that possibly he might be "in trade" and preferring to accept him on his obvious merits—Ruggles held his peace.

So the days fled past, and Ruggles, working hard, had but a single cloud upon his fair horizon. This was due to his learning that the Vienna branch was almost ready to open its doors for trade, while he had as yet received no official directions to hold himself in readiness for a change of place. He wrote again to the European general manager, recalling his former application, and received a rather brief reply which contained no more than the information that his letter had been received and would be duly considered. Still, it was courteous in tone, and Ruggles, a born optimist, told himself that he was sure to get his promotion very shortly.

CHAPTER IV.

Darthea needed a new pair of shoes. She had needed a new pair of shoes for a long time, as Ruggles had himself observed to his great concern. Darthea might have needed a new gown or a new hat or a new pair of gloves or a new almost anything, for that matter—which no doubt she did—and Ruggles would have been able to endure her necessity with fortitude. But he had grown very fond of Darthea, of whom he had seen a good deal, and it hurt him to see her in need of some nice new shoes when he lived in an atmosphere so rich in this commodity. Sometimes, glancing surreptitiously at her dainty feet, his mind would turn involuntarily to the box that contained precisely the shape, size, and style which would best serve and adorn them.

But the time came when Darthea's little feet were almost on the ground, and the uppers of her shoes were in such condition as to make resoling a useless extravagance. Wherefore, accompanied by Miss Challand, who was much more insistent than her niece on the question of fit and finish, and therefore commanded a more pains-

taking attention, Darthea set out to buy her pair of shoes. The weather had been stormy for several days, which rendered the purchase more peremptory, so they caught a bus, descended at the Place de l'Opéra, and walked up the boulevard to "Merrie England."

"I'm sure you'd do much better at the Walkeasy shop across the street, my dear," said Miss Challand. "Their shoes may cost a little more, but you would get quite the worth of it in wear and comfort." Ruggles would have felt like embracing her could he have heard this.

"Possibly," Darthea answered, "but I hate those pug-nosed American shoes, auntie. Besides, I like to do my buying in a British shop."

But alas for the inscrutable ways in which Fate controls our destinies! A swift examination of their stock appeared to demonstrate that Darthea's particular requirements were the only ones the British shop was unable to supply at that particular moment. They were expecting hourly a new consignment of goods, and if the lady could call again in a day or two, she would find the precise article for which she asked. Darthea did not wish to call again. It was a Saturday, and she and her aunt had an engagement to walk with Ruggles in the Bois the following afternoon, and she wanted to wear her new shoes. Wherefore, politely expressing their regret to the suave youth who had waited on them, Darthea and her aunt left the shop and paused for a moment to open their umbrellas.

"Fancy a man of any self-respect spending his days on his knees taking off and putting on muddy shoes!" said Miss Challand, gathering up her skirt as they waited for the traffic policeman to blow his whistle. "I'd rather be a *garçon de café*."

"I never think of them as men,"

said Darthea. "They seem part of the shop furniture."

"For my part," her aunt replied, "I much prefer to be waited on by a woman."

"What does it matter," answered Darthea indifferently. "Oh, dear, I must have my shoes for to-morrow. We might meet some of Mr. Ruggles' friends, and these wretched things will be worse than ever after this wading around in the mud."

"You'll find just what you want across the street at the Walkeasy shop, I'm sure," said Miss Challand.

"The name is enough to turn one away," Darthea observed. "Fancy! 'Walkeasy!' it's not even grammatical."

"But very American. Mr. Ruggles wears them, I'm sure. People will look at your feet and take you for an American."

"Not if they keep on looking and notice my hat and dress," Darthea answered sadly. "American girls are much more chic than English. They wear their clothes. We hang them on ourselves."

"Nonsense! It's just because they usually have more money to spend on them. I could be chic myself if I had about a hundred a year to spend on nothing but clothes."

Opposite the hospitable doors of the Walkeasy shop they paused for a moment to look at the handsome display of samples.

"Why do they put those silly bumps on the toes?" Darthea asked.

"I'm sure I don't know. For the same reason that the French make their shoes duck-billed, I suppose. Because they think it's pretty. Anyhow, they're jolly comfortable and wear like iron. Let's go in and see if you can find anything to suit you." Miss Challand stepped to the door, which was swung open in front of her. "My word," said she, "the place is jammed!"

The Walkeasy store was, in fact, doing a rushing business, principally in the sale of rubber overshoes, for the continued chilly rains were reaping their harvest of early autumn colds, and the public was taking its precautions—a little late, as the public usually does. Miss Challand, expecting Darthea to follow at her heels, made a dive for the stairs leading up to the ladies' department, only to find the place packed with insistent customers, a good half of which were French. The other half appeared to be composed of most of the nations of the world which are not French. With a snort of disgust, for the air was a bit oppressive, she looked around for her niece. But Darthea was not there.

Darthea was very much not there. Darthea was in fact standing in a trance-like condition at the foot of the stairs, staring with fascinated eyes at Mr. Ruggles, who, quite unconscious of her near presence, was down on the knees of his well-pressed trousers at the feet of a swarthy and perfumed individual who looked as if his ancestry might have been terribly confused in the Balkans, where trouble is always to be found. His emanations were principally of perfume, garlic, tobacco, cognac, and sachet powder—with due recognition to the brilliantine on his well-cared-for beard and mustache.

"How mosh—dem shoon?" asked the swarthy gentleman.

"Twenty-five francs, sir," Ruggles told him.

"Too mosh. I gif you zewnty."

"Oh, we never change our price, sir," said Ruggles, smiling up at him pleasantly. "It's not the way business is done in America, and this is an American company that we represent, here."

"Jess—I know," grunted the customer. "I am American myself—of Chicago. I go now by Belgrade to fight dose Osmanlis. I am of ze reserve corps. Captain, y'understand? All

right. Gimme dose shoon. Dey look all right."

"Very good, sir," said Ruggles. "Will you take them or shall I have them sent?"

"Send dem around to l'Hotel de France et de la Serbie."

Darthea heard no more. The Balkan gentleman had risen and was being escorted by Ruggles to the desk, while Miss Challand, missing her niece, descended to find Darthea clinging to the newel post and staring wildly in the direction of the cashier's desk.

"My dear!" cried Miss Challand. "What is the matter? Are you ill?"

"I feel—I feel—" Darthea began, and then, catching sight of Ruggles scribbling off his sales check and knowing that he might turn at any moment, she said hurriedly, "I want some air. Let's go out."

Miss Challand, noting Darthea's dilated pupils and the curiously congested look of her cheeks, lost no time in getting her to the door. Once in the open air, Darthea appeared to breathe more freely.

"What is it, dear?" asked her aunt solicitously.

"Oh—just the smell of that horrid shop," Darthea answered. "Never mind the shoes, auntie. Let's go home."

"Very well. But what was it that upset you so?" Miss Challand stopped short in her tracks. "Was anybody rude?" she demanded.

"No. Of course not," Darthea answered shortly. "I simply felt—felt ill for a moment. Let's walk. It's not raining hard, and I'd like the air."

"Your feet will be sopping," objected her aunt, "and your shoes—"

"Oh, bother my shoes!" exclaimed Darthea, so sharply that her aunt gave her a quick sidelong look filled with apprehension. She had never known her niece to give way to nerves, and Darthea certainly did not look ill. On the contrary, her eyes were bright and had

a peculiar hard expression that Miss Challand had never seen in them before, while on her cheeks, usually of a delicate pink, there was a flame which attracted the attention of passers-by. Miss Challand was worried and perplexed.

"My dear," said she, "I believe you have fever. Your face is crimson."

"It's nothing," Darthea answered shortly. "Coming in from the fresh air into a stuffy place like that always makes me feel a bit stifled. I don't take exercise enough, I fancy."

CHAPTER V.

It was Sunday, and as Ruggles gasped from the contact of the cold water from his big bath sponge, he was in two minds as to how he should spend his morning—whether to attend service at the English church and walk down afterward as far as the river with Miss Challand and Darthea, or to look up Lorenz, who had not put in an appearance at the store the day before and who he feared might possibly be ill. He decided in favor of the latter, as he had to see Darthea in the afternoon, and, while he had no particular liking for Lorenz, he felt sorry for the man, whose disagreeable nature made him a recluse and who had no friends in Paris.

This solicitude for Lorenz was quite uncalled for. As a matter of fact, the saturnine Austrian had, with the sanction of Mr. Durand, crossed the Channel on Friday night and by special appointment spent an hour of Saturday morning in consultation with the general European manager of the Walk-easy Shoe Company of America. This interview resulting entirely to his satisfaction, he had returned immediately to Paris.

Ruggles dressed with care and went down to the little dining room for his *petit déjeuner*. Beside his plate was a letter addressed in Darthea's round

English hand. Ruggles opened it at once, fearing that something might have occurred to prevent Darthea from walking with him in the afternoon; in which supposition he was quite correct, for the note read as follows:

DEAR MR. RUGGLES: This afternoon, on entering the shop of the Walkeasy Shoe to make a purchase, I was extremely surprised to discover that you are employed there as a clerk, and to see you in the act of serving a customer.

I do not know how your social distinctions may be drawn in America, but among English people of the class to which my aunt and I belong, it is not the custom to admit on terms of intimacy persons engaged in such forms of occupation as your own proves to be.

I do not wish to seem unkind, and I acknowledge fully the obligation that led to our acquaintance, and the great service you so pluckily rendered me. But what I am quite unable to forgive is your having deceived Miss Challand and myself in regard to your station of life, which you led us to believe was one that corresponded to our own. This deception has led to social relations which otherwise could never have existed between us, and which must be hereafter discontinued. Yours truly,

DARTHEA WESTBROOKE.

Ruggles laid down the letter with the glow all gone from his face. What had the girl supposed him to be, anyhow? A Vanderbilt or an Astor? Had she thought that, if he were rich, he would have taken her aunt and herself around Paris on the tops of trams and busses?

Being totally unable to understand, he came to the very natural conclusion that Darthea must have thought him guilty of having tried to sail under false colors and to give her and her aunt the impression that he was a person of considerable importance in the world of trade. He remembered having once hinted that he hoped shortly to be intrusted with a position of responsibility which might make it necessary for him to live in Vienna, and he reflected that after such a statement it must naturally have been disappointing to her to find him trying on shoes.

Darthea, after all, could scarcely be expected to understand that a man might be fitting customers one day and occupying the proud position of manager in a similar store a week later. Artists were always impractical folk, and Darthea was an artist. She had evidently jumped to the conclusion that he had been exaggerating his business importance with the idea of trying to impress her. She was really not to be blamed, the more so as the mere fact of her being so upset over finding him engaged in trying on shoes showed that, in her opinion, such an occupation was unworthy of him. After all, very likely she was right, and he had been abusing his talents in remaining for so long a time a mere salesman.

He decided to call on Darthea immediately after luncheon and explain his position, trusting to her friendship and sense of fairness to forgive him for having kept her in the dark as to his actual work, and to tell her of the expected change in its character. Meanwhile, he would look up Lorenz.

Lorenz lived in a little hotel in Neuilly not far from the *Porte Maillot*, so Ruggles took the "Metro," changing at the *Etoile*. Going directly to Lorenz's room, he knocked at the door. "*Entrez,*" came a voice from within, and Ruggles entered. The young Austrian was in his shirt sleeves and apparently engaged in packing a small black trunk. At sight of Ruggles, he straightened up, with a startled expression on his saturnine face.

"Hello!" said Ruggles. "Moving?"

"Yes," Lorenz answered, "I am moving." A tinge of color came into his sallow cheeks, and he glanced sharply at his fellow clerk. "I do not like it here," said he, in a sullen, half-defiant voice.

"'Tisn't much of a place," Ruggles admitted, glancing out of the unwashed window into the slovenly court on which

it opened. "Where are you moving to?"

Lorenz leaned over to lay a pair of trousers in the trunk.

"I am going to live with some relations," he muttered, as if begrudging the information.

Ruggles, feeling rather embarrassed, seated himself on the edge of the bed. It struck him that Lorenz was not very hospitable; also that he seemed loath to offer any information in regard to his change of residence. Perhaps his relations were people in the lower walks of life; they might run a laundry or sell horse meat or have a little workmen's café or something of the sort, and Lorenz might be rather ashamed of them. Ruggles knew nothing of Lorenz beyond the fact that he hailed from Vienna, where he had been a clerk in an Austrian shoe store.

He did not pursue his inquiries in regard to Lorenz's future movements, but merely suggested that they take a stroll in the Bois for the sake of conversation and mutual lingual benefit.

"I'm beginning to get the hang of it now, Lorenz," said he cheerfully. "I sat up half the night dopping out those verb endings you gave me."

"You will never learn to speak good German," said Lorenz dismally. "Your mind is not of the right sort."

"What's the matter with my mind?" asked Ruggles, rather irritated.

"You have very much to learn yet," said Lorenz.

Ruggles, not knowing to what particular branch of learning he might refer, answered easily:

"Oh, I guess we all have, so far as that goes. But I can tell you one thing, old man—I haven't got such an awful lot to learn about the shoe business. I worked a couple of years in the factory before I went into the store. I know the shoe business, all right. Why shouldn't I? My father invented most of the machines that the Walkeasy peo-

ple are using to-day. I know how shoes are made, and I know how to sell 'em, too, and once I get charge of this Vienna branch, you'll see some leather in the air. Just you keep your eye on me."

Lorenz gave him an owlish glare.

"And what if you do not get this Vienna branch?" he asked, with the suspicion of a sneer.

"Oh, there won't be any trouble about that," Ruggles answered. "The company isn't the kind to turn a fellow down when he's worked for 'em as I have. You're the only one besides Durand that knows I've been after this job, and I don't mind telling you that I've got it pretty well cinched."

"You have it what?"

"I've got it where I want it," Ruggles answered impatiently. "The only thing that bothers me is not hearing something definite. They must be pretty near ready to open up. You haven't heard anything about it, have you?"

Lorenz folded a coat neatly and wrapped it in a copy of *Le Matin*, before laying it in the trunk.

"I would not count too much on anything," said he.

"What d'you mean?" Ruggles asked.

"I mean it," answered Lorenz, "and it is so. A man should never count on anything or anybody. It is the way of the world. You seen that coat I have just put in my box? I bought it in which to be married."

Ruggles pricked up his ears. He looked at Lorenz from another slant.

"What happened?" he asked, in a softened voice.

"What has happened?" Lorenz glared at him as if Ruggles had flicked him on the raw. "I will tell you what has happened. I was to marry the niece of that man who had the shop where I worked in Vienna, and because of some troubles with a customer, there was a quarrel. It was very bad. She

would not see me once more, so I packed my trunk and came to Paris. But I promised to myself that one day I should go back to Vienna and take all of his trade, even if I had to work myself for nothing and to bones and skin. And perhaps it may come true, already."

Ruggles stared at him, fascinated. It seemed as if a new and undeniable bond of sympathy were suddenly established between him and Lorenz.

"I know just how you feel," he said impulsively. He wiped his face with his handkerchief, for the stuffy little room was hot. "Maybe when I get out there, I can help you some."

"You cannot help me at all," Lorenz snarled.

"Oh, well," answered Ruggles reassuringly, for he felt sorry for Lorenz, "no harm meant, old man. Girls don't always mean just what they say, though. I—"

"I am very busy!" Lorenz's voice was almost a squall.

"Oh, all right," said Ruggles soothingly, for now that Lorenz had confessed to a tragic love affair, he was ready to excuse anything. "I won't bother you then, old man." He moved toward the door. "But if I can be of any service to you—"

"You cannot. Good-by."

"Good-by," Ruggles answered, and went out thinking that after all a man might be crossed in love, meet with business reverses, and still be a little appreciative of disinterested friendship. He was sorry for Lorenz, who, after all, seemed to be an honest, patient, hard-working sort of fellow, and he hoped that some day he might be able to help him in some way.

After leaving the ungracious Lorenz, Ruggles bought an American paper at a news stand and walked across to the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, where he sat down on a bench to read and to admire the passing throng. The latter

occupation was, however, soon neglected for the former, as the war in the Balkans had just begun, and Ruggles found much to interest him in the accounts of military movements. Like many men of humdrum occupations, Ruggles loved to read of violence and strife. He was sitting thus when a pleasant voice said in English:

"May I share the end of your bench, sir?"

Ruggles glanced up and saw a well-dressed, wholesome-looking young man of about thirty, broad of shoulder and with a strong, kindly face.

"Certainly," Ruggles answered, moving aside a little. "Sit down."

"Thanks." The young man seated himself, resting his gloved hands on the curve of his stick. For a moment or two he watched the glittering spectacle in silence; then he turned to Ruggles.

"A great sight," he observed. "Especially when you see it for the first time."

"Yes," Ruggles agreed, pleased to be addressed and noting that the other spoke with a pronounced English accent. "There isn't a city in the world that's got anything to beat the Avenue du Bois on a bright Sunday morning at this time of year."

"Believe you're right. There's such a lot of room—and that long sweep runnin' right up to the Arc de Triomphe is rippin'."

A group of officers, beautifully mounted and in pale-blue tunics with scarlet breeches, cantered past. Ruggles' companion watched them with interest.

"Good-lookin' gees," he commented, "though I must say I don't think much of the ridin'. Look at those chaps bob."

"Some of them can ride," Ruggles answered. "If you take in the horse show, you'll see some snappy work. But all the same they're not in the same class with our American cavalry when

it comes to riding—or anything else, I guess," he added patriotically.

"You're American?"

"Yes. But I live here in Paris. I work for an American shoe concern."

"I see," said the other, and shot him a swift glance. Like most casual acquaintances of Ruggles', he had taken the boy for a young American tourist, probably a student.

They chatted for a moment or two, and then the Englishman, whose clear, blue eyes had been caught by the headlines on Ruggles' newspaper, asked in his crisp, pleasant voice:

"I say, might I have a look at your paper? I couldn't get one this morning, and I'm awfully interested in the Balkan news."

"Of course," said Ruggles. "Keep it, if you like. I'm through reading it. What do you think's going to happen out there?"

"There's goin' to be a big fight, I'm afraid, and I fancy the poor old Turks will get an awful drubbin'. As a matter of fact, I'm on my way out there."

Ruggles straightened up and looked at the other with a sudden interest and admiration.

"You are?"

"Yes. Leavin' to-morrow night for Marseilles, where I get a ship for Constantinople."

"War correspondent, perhaps?" Ruggles asked.

"No, I'm a surgeon in charge of a unit of the British Red Cross. My crowd have gone directly from England, but I wanted to catch a glimpse of France."

"I wish I were going," said Ruggles.

"It's not goin' to be all beer and skittles," replied the other, and rose. "Well, I must be gettin' on, since I've only two days to see Paris. You're sure you've finished with this paper?"

"Oh, yes," Ruggles answered, sorry to have this brief encounter terminate.

"Thanks awfully, then. Good morning."

"Good morning, sir. Good luck," said Ruggles.

"Thanks," and he swung off with a brisk, athletic stride in the direction of the Bois, while Ruggles looked after him wistfully.

He felt strangely alone and rather depressed after the young doctor had gone, and presently got up himself and wandered down the Champs Elysées and across to the Boulevard St. Germain, where he lunched at a little restaurant. Then, judging that Darthea and her aunt must have finished their déjeuner, he turned his rather nervous steps toward the gardens of the Luxembourg.

CHAPTER VI.

Miss Challand opened the door, and, as Ruggles wished her "good afternoon," he heard the swish of skirts and caught a glimpse of Darthea, as she passed swiftly from the studio into the adjoining bedroom, closing the door behind her.

"I'm glad you've come," said Miss Challand. "I hate mysteries, and I can't get a word out of Darthea. All that she will tell me is that she wishes never to see you again and that she wrote you to that effect."

"She certainly did," answered Ruggles, much relieved to find that Darthea had not attempted to prejudice her aunt in his disfavor. His naturally buoyant spirits promptly rose as he followed Miss Challand into the little studio.

"Now then," said that lady, seating herself and motioning to Ruggles to do the same, "what's it all about? I'm sure you could have done nothing that was not nice."

"If I have, I didn't mean to," Ruggles answered, warming under this kindly expression of confidence. "I guess I'd better tell you all about myself from the start, Miss Challand."

"I think that would be best. To tell the truth, I've sometimes felt that I didn't know as much about you as I should of a young man who has been so much with my niece."

"There isn't much to tell," Ruggles answered. "You see, it's like this: My father worked for the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America."

"In what capacity?" asked Miss Challand, slightly raising her eyebrows.

"He invented machines for stitching soles and shaping uppers and—— Well, you could hardly understand without seeing the process. He might have been well off now if he had lived and hadn't invested his savings in good-for-nothing mining shares. He wanted me to learn the shoe business from the bottom up, so I started in the shops."

"In the factory where the shoes were made?"

"Yes. I learned the whole process."

"I see. Not a half-bad idea if one decides to go in for trade, though I must say I think he might have looked a little higher for you, especially in a country like America, where I understand that there are so many business opportunities."

"I guess you don't quite understand, Miss Challand," said Ruggles. "The Walkeasy Shoe Company is one of the biggest industrial concerns in the United States. Our factories cover over ten acres of ground, and you could shoe the whole population of Paris with our annual output. But that isn't the point just now. Some day I'll show you the figures. What I was going to say is that there seemed a better chance for a live young fellow to get on in the retail branch than in the factory. You see, it won't be many years before we have big retail stores like the one here in Paris doing business in most of the big cities of Europe, and these stores have got to have managers that know the trade."

"But surely you would never care to

become the manager of a shoe shop?" said Miss Challand.

Ruggles stared at her dazedly, doubting that he could have heard aright. Not care to become the manager of one of the Walkeasy Company's splendid stores? Then, reflecting that she was English and a woman, and so scarcely to be expected to have any conception of modern commercial methods, he answered with the smile that had seldom failed him in critical moments:

"You don't understand yet, Miss Challand. Nowadays, if a young fellow wants to get ahead in a big business, he's got to start at the very bottom of the ladder and work up step by step; that is, unless he's got a pull with the concern and a place all made for him. Even then, the chances are that all he has to do is to draw his pay and let somebody who knows the business do the work for him. But that isn't real business. Why, do you know that the son of the president of our company?"—Ruggles' voice was slightly moderated at the mention of the president, as if he had been a lay brother speaking of the grand master of his order—"worked in the factory, just as I did? He went to work at seven o'clock in the morning with his dinner pail, just like the rest of us."

"You see," Ruggles went on, "Dick Downing is the real thing—the real American. The men he worked with in the factory all called him 'Dick,' and he liked it. That's the way we are in America. It doesn't make any difference that his father's a millionaire and a big swell. Dick Downing isn't too good for any of us, nor his sister, either. Why do you know they came into the store about three months ago, and you'd have thought we were old friends the way they treated me? And here he'll probably be our next president——"

"President of the United States?" exclaimed Miss Challand, for the reveren-

tial hush of Ruggles' tone as he mentioned this exalted office impressed her in spite of her bewilderment.

"No—president of the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America," said Ruggles. "And his sister, Ruth Downing, is just as fine as Dick. While I was trying on her shoes——"

"Trying—on—her—*shoes*!" gasped Miss Challand. "Do you try on—shoes?"

"Why, yes," answered Ruggles, bewildered by her tone.

Miss Challand stared at him stonily.

"Why didn't you tell us of this before?" she demanded.

"Oh, I don't know. But it wasn't because I was ashamed to. I thought I'd wait until I got my promotion."

"And to think that all of this time you have been going about the city with my niece!" Miss Challand's voice was almost shrill.

"Well, why not?"

Miss Challand had never seen such an expression on his face, and it excited her. So the man was an impostor—a mere clerk in a shoe shop who had been masquerading as a gentleman, and so successfully as to have entered into terms of social equality and even intimacy with Darthea and herself! And now that her niece had found him out, he seemed disposed to be ugly about it, if facial expression was an indication of emotions within.

"There is no use in trying to argue the matter," said she. "Our points of view in this respect are so different that we could never come to any understanding. No doubt in America the lines of social difference are very loosely drawn, but with us English it is quite different. The idea of my niece continuing her social relations with one in your position is quite impossible, Mr. Ruggles."

Ruggles leaned slightly forward, his expression one of mingled perplexity and resentment.

"What's the matter with my position, Miss Challand?" he asked. "And what's the matter with me? I've always worked hard. A fellow has to work his way up, and I'm doing it as fast as a man can. The company is sort of like an army—you've got to go up rank by rank. Why, if I make good, I might be general manager some day—or even president of the company." He gave free rein to his imagination for a brief second. "And that's just like being the general of an army. People have to wear shoes, just as they have to eat and drink, and it seems to me that the concern that gives them the best value for their money is doing a lot of good. We sell the best ready-made shoes in the world. If I've got anything to be ashamed of, I wish you'd tell me what it is."

As he went on, he became truly eloquent. Miss Challand's tightened features softened as she stared at the flushed boyish face. She had never before considered the question of trade from the viewpoint so eloquently presented by Ruggles, and her British sense of fair play forced her to admit that it might be well taken.

"Miss Challand," said Ruggles, "I wish I could speak to your niece."

Miss Challand hesitated. She was sorry for Ruggles, but she could not forget that he was a shoe clerk and, even though promoted to the charge of a shop, must still, she felt, be separated from her niece by a social gulf that admitted of no bridging. She reflected, however, that Ruggles would soon be leaving Paris for Vienna, after which they need see no more of him. Besides, he had been guilty of no actual fault, and for the sake of their past pleasant relations, it seemed ungracious to send him off with a snubbing. So she answered a little reluctantly:

"Very well. I'll ask her to come and listen to what you have to say, Mr. Ruggles, though I doubt whether you

will be able to change her attitude." She passed into the other room.

Ruggles stepped to the window and stood looking out across the Luxembourg gardens. Ten minutes passed. Then the door opened and Darthea entered the studio, alone. Ruggles, turning from the window, thought that he had never thoroughly appreciated her high-bred beauty.

"Good afternoon," said Darthea. "My aunt says that you insist on speaking to me. Well?"

"Nothing," said Ruggles shortly, "if you'd rather not have me bother you."

"I tried to make that clear in my letter," Darthea retorted.

"Oh, I guess you succeeded," Ruggles answered, stung as if he had been lashed across the face with a dog whip.

He opened the door of the antechamber, went out—and turned.

"Good-by," he said.

"Good-by," Darthea answered, her hand on the knob to close the door behind him.

"Good-by," Ruggles repeated. "I won't bother you again."

A sudden mania seized him. He took Darthea's hand, as it rested on the knob of the door, and raised it to his lips. Darthea was too startled to withdraw it.

"Good-by," Ruggles muttered. "Good-by, Darthea." It was the first time that he had ever called her "Darthea."

"Miss Westbrooke, please," said Darthea, snatching away her hand.

"Certainly," Ruggles replied. "Good-by, Miss Westbrooke. And say, Darthea," he added desperately, for she had stepped back and was closing the door, "there's just one thing I want to tell you—" He tried to get a farewell you—"

"Well?"

"You'll probably meet lots of richer men than me," said Ruggles, speaking fast and rather thickly, "but you'll never

meet one that thinks more of you than what I do. I don't ask anything of you, but if ever you need a good friend—"

"Thank you, Mr. Ruggles," said Darthea, in her most limpid voice. "You're awfully kind, I'm sure. Good-by."

And the door closed gently in Ruggles' face.

CHAPTER VII.

Ruggles went out into the street hot of heart and blurred as to his eyes. But these conditions were as nothing compared to the mystification of his mind. No doubt he felt rather like a dog which has been caught and whipped without in the least understanding why. He did not blame Darthea; he did not blame anybody. He was merely very puzzled and very sad.

Although conscious of a certain tender sentiment for Darthea, Ruggles was by no means in love with her, nor did he deceive himself in this respect. But she was the first girl friend of her class that the boy had ever possessed, and this friendship had been very sweet and dear to him; more so, perhaps, than if it had been colored with passion. He was very fond of her, and deeply admired and respected her, and it cut him deeply, not only in his pride, but in his heart, that she could think him capable of cheap deception. He hoped, however, that on reflection she would relent, in which case he was quite ready and willing to forgive her and be readmitted to her friendship. There was much that was doglike in Ruggles' devotions.

Meanwhile, however, he was cheered by the reflection that there still remained to him two stable quantities on which to nail his worldly faith—the Downings and the Walkeasy Shoe Company. He worshiped both and felt that neither could ever betray his confidence.

It was still, however, with a very heavy heart that Ruggles crossed the river and started to walk up the Champs Elysées on his way back to the little room in Passy where he purposed to spend the rest of the sunny afternoon in the study of German verbs. He had nearly reached the Carlton when he saw a big limousine draw up before the door and an exquisitely gowned girl, followed by an elderly woman, descend and enter the hotel. Though still at some distance, Ruggles' quick eyes recognized the girl at the very first glance. It was none other than Ruth Downing.

A sudden resolution, the daring of which caused Ruggles' healthy young heart to whirl like a starting taxicab, fetched him up "all standing," as sailors say. Here, sent perhaps by Providence, was his friend in need. Less than an hour ago he had been vaunting the loyalty of the Downing family to their great army of vassals. He would put this loyalty to the test. He would call upon Ruth, explain his trouble—which was after all more or less her own doing in having fired his heart with ambition—and demand her sympathy and advice.

There was nothing presumptuous about this swift decision on the boy's part. He felt honestly that it was his right, and there was about it something rather fine and belonging to a feudal age. His father before him had lived and labored and died in the service of the company, which is to say in the service of the Downing family. He himself was giving the best of his brain and body, the best of his youth, to the same service. Now, as a result of this fidelity, he was more unhappy than he could remember ever to have been, and he could see no reason why he should not turn to a Downing for aid in his perplexity. The responsibilities of liegdom should work both ways.

Glancing at the reflection of himself

in the plate-glass window of an automobile agency, Ruggles was quite satisfied with his presentability. As always, he was nicely and becomingly dressed, and he reflected with a certain amount of professional pride that certainly no man in Paris was better shod or stockinged. It is probable that there was not at that moment a better-looking young fellow between the Louvre and the gates of the Bois de Boulogne than our modest shoe clerk. He entered the fashionable hotel with an air of assurance which he was far from feeling, and sent up his card to Miss Downing—his social card, which was inscribed simply: "*Mr. Richard P. Ruggles.*" Ruggles was proud of that card because two-thirds of it were identical with Richard P. Downing, junior and senior.

The boy returned presently to say that Miss Downing would receive Mr. Ruggles in the salon of her suite. Ruggles mounted in the lift, glancing at himself in the mirror and pushing back a long lock of wavy yellow hair. He was ushered into a salon prettily furnished in Louis XV. style, and perched himself on a chair a good deal as a bird reposes itself for a brief instant on a swaying twig.

The bell boy bowed and retired, and Ruggles wondered whether perhaps he should have given him a tip. Some minutes passed, and they were not restful ones to Ruggles, who was beginning to repent him of his temerity. Then the door to an adjoining room opened, and Ruth entered. Ruggles could not have told to his dying day what she wore. If it had been a bathing peignoir, it is probable that he would not have observed the fact.

It may have been that Ruth had second-sight and divined that Ruggles had some real and pressing need of her, or perhaps it was merely her natural graciousness of manner. At any rate, the instant she entered all of Ruggles' embarrassment vanished, and as their eyes

met, he felt that he had made no mistake in coming to her.

"How do you do, Mr. Ruggles?" said Ruth, and offered him her firm little hand. "I'm very glad to see you. Won't you sit down?"

Ruth was her father's own daughter, her brother's own sister, and no employee of the Walkeasy Company was in any danger of being snubbed at her hands. She would have received the door boy of the Paris store if she had known that he was in the service of the company. The New York State manager, whom her father had asked to dine with them at their hotel in New York City before they had sailed for Europe, had told her that he had worked his way up through factory and salesroom, and Ruth had no contempt for the humble clerk. In the present case, she thought it probable that Ruggles had acted on her advice to ask for a promotion and had come to thank her and tell her of his success.

Thank her he did, and at once, for her gracious reception, taking his chair again when she had seated herself. Then he hesitated for an instant, not awkwardly, but as if trying to decide just how to begin. He was an easy talker, but much attention on a hurried world had taught him to be brief and concise, wasting no time in circumlocution; so that when he spoke, it was directly to the point.

"I was just coming up the Champs Elysées," said he, "and I saw you go into the hotel. It was sort of funny, because there's something that's bothering me a good deal, and I was wishing that I knew of somebody who might be willing to put me right. When I saw you, I remembered how nice you were to me that day you came into the shop, and I thought that maybe, as I worked for the company—which is sort of like working for your family—you might be willing to give me a little ad-

vice." His eyes rested on hers with a look of frank, boyish appeal.

"I'm sure I should be very glad to help you in any way I can, Mr. Ruggles," said Ruth. "Has it something to do with what I said to you that day?"

"Oh, no," said Ruggles. "But before I go on, I ought to thank you for that advice, too. I've put in my application for the managership of the Vienna branch. Wrote it that night and sent it off the next day with an indorsement from Mr. Durand, our manager."

Ruth's face lighted.

"I'm so glad!" said she warmly. "Drop me a line as soon as you hear definitely, so that I can send you a word of congratulation."

Ruggles glowed.

"Thank you ever so much, Miss Downing," said he. "That will certainly be my first act, as soon as I hear." He hesitated for an instant. "Miss Downing," he asked, "do you think there's anything to be ashamed of about selling any first-class article directly to customers? Anything, no matter what, like soap or hats or underclothes or—shoes?"

"I most certainly do not!" answered Ruth decidedly. "What I said that day was not to hurt your feelings—as you ought to have had sense enough to know. It was merely to—well, to fire your ambition."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that," said Ruggles. "You couldn't say anything to hurt anybody's feelings if you tried. Then you believe that a man who tries on shoes is just as good as anybody else?" He gave her a keen look.

Ruth knit her broad brows and reflected for an instant.

"I do and I don't," she answered. "It's like this: If the man whose work it is to try on shoes were as good as lots of other men in brains and body and general strong efficiency, he would not be very long contented at trying on shoes for a living, and he would soon

be making a better living at a much less menial occupation. After all, it's rather like a servant's work—fitting clothes of any sort to another person's body. Don't you think so, yourself?"

Ruggles' face clouded as he pondered this point of view for a moment. Then it cleared.

"I guess you're right," said he. "I never looked at it that way before. You see, I never thought much about the people who bought 'em. I was always thinking about the shoes."

"That's the reason," said Ruth triumphantly, "and a very good reason, too."

She was liking Ruggles more and more every moment, and this naïve explanation of his pleased her tremendously. Also, it suggested to her mind a quite new idea, which was that while the people who patronize furnishers of various sorts might disregard them, just so might these furnishers disregard their customers except as means of gaining a livelihood and fitting their handicraft to the objects for which it had been designed. Ruggles' next words crystallized this thought.

"It's like this," said he. "I know how to make shoes and I know how to fit them and sell 'em, too. I'm sort of like a blacksmith, as I look at it. But most people have got a good deal of respect for a blacksmith and don't think any the less of him because he fits a shoe to a horse or an ox or a donkey. They don't look upon him as the donkey's servant." He gave her his flashing smile. "In my business, I've shod lots of donkeys—the two-legged sort."

Ruth burst into a laugh in which Ruggles joined.

"Well," said she, "I think a good deal as you do—but most people don't. Now there's Dick. He was perfectly happy to work in the factory to learn how shoes were made. But he'd no more try on a pair of shoes for a customer than he would shave him. And

if he ever did try, and the customer happened to be disagreeable, the chances are that the company would have to pay for a damage suit and a new plate-glass window for the store."

Ruggles laughed and his eyes kindled. He had often felt that way himself.

"Yes," said he, more to himself than to Ruth, "I'm beginning to catch on. I guess Darthea was right."

Ruth pricked up her ears.

"Who is Darthea?" she demanded.

"Darthea? Oh, she's an English girl I know. She came into the store to buy some shoes the other day, when I was at work. I didn't see her, but she saw me. And now she won't have anything more to do with me because I sell shoes for a living."

"Oh," said Ruth softly. She was beginning to understand the deeper reason for Ruggles' call. "Tell me about her. But first tell me this: Why didn't you let her know what your work was?"

"She never asked me," said Ruggles, "nor her aunt, Miss Challand. I only got acquainted with her the day before you came into the store. By the time I got to know her pretty well, I was waiting to hear that I'd got the managership of the Vienna store; so I thought I wouldn't tell her anything until I was sure, and then give her a surprise."

"I see," said Ruth. She had dropped her chin in her hand and was staring at Ruggles through narrowed lids. "How did you happen to meet her?"

"It was up on the Marne," said Ruggles. "I 'most always go out in the country on my bike when I get a day off, and I was riding along the tow-path by the river when I ran onto a couple of tramps bothering a girl who was painting, all by herself. She'd given 'em a couple of francs, but they had seen some more money in her purse

and were trying to scare her into giving it up. I shoved 'em into the river and we both beat it."

"You shoved them into the river?" Ruth's violet eyes began to glow.

"Yes," Ruggles admitted. "There wasn't anything else to do. They were big, husky fellows and had clubs. I took 'em unawares and pushed 'em over the edge of the bank. Then she jumped on my wheel, and I grabbed up her paint box and ran after her. I waited, though, long enough to see that they weren't going to drown."

"Oh, you did?" said Ruth. "And what if they'd been drowning?"

"Oh, I suppose I'd had to try to fish 'em out," said Ruggles. "But there was no danger. One of 'em started to crawl out and come for me, and I whaled him over the head with her easel, then beat it."

He laughed contagiously, and Ruth joined him, although her mirth had a rather peculiar note.

"And what happened then? Was she all alone?"

"Oh, no," said Ruggles. "Her aunt, Miss Challand, was with her, but Darthea had gone out alone to make a sketch of the river. We met Miss Challand coming down the towpath."

"And afterward?" Ruth asked.

Warming under her sympathy, Ruggles told the rest of his story—of how he had become intimate with the two, walking with them in his free moments, sometimes accompanying them on little excursions and to church or for tea in some modest restaurant. He told also of how Darthea had come into the shop and seen him trying on shoes, and he showed Ruth the note that he had received that morning from Darthea. Ruth perused it and bit her lip.

"Nasty little prig!" she muttered under her breath.

"What?" Ruggles asked.

"Oh, nothing. And then what?"

Ruggles described his interview of

the early afternoon. There came a deep flush into Ruth's soft cheeks as she listened; her dark-blue eyes grew almost black, and she bit her full under lip. His simple narrative finished, Ruggles looked questioningly at her.

"Do you think it was all my fault, Miss Downing?" he asked.

Ruth shook her head.

"No," she answered, "I don't think that you were in any way to blame."

"Then what do you think I ought to do?" he asked.

"That depends," Ruth answered. "Are you very fond of her?"

"Yes," Ruggles answered frankly. "I think a lot of her. You see, I've got to know her pretty well, and I'm satisfied that she doesn't understand. She hasn't got a mean streak in her."

"You're in love with her, I suppose," said Ruth, not as one who asks a question, but as if merely stating a foregone conclusion.

Ruggles sat bolt upright and his eyes grew very round.

"In love with her!" he gasped. "Why—no—nothing of the sort. Why—it's ridiculous! I've given you a wrong idea about the business, Miss Downing. I just liked her an awful lot and admired her looks and her talent. But I never thought about being in love with her. Gee!"

"Did you ever think about her being in love with you?" asked Ruth.

Ruggles stared.

"In love with me!" His voice held a note of reproof.

"What I'm trying to find out," said Ruth crisply, "in order to help you as much as I can, is why you should both be so cut up about this thing unless you're in love with each other."

"Oh—I beg your pardon, Miss Downing. I see what you mean." Ruggles leaned forward in his chair, regarding her intently. "Well, you see, I'm all alone in the world, and sometimes I miss what most other people

have—somebody besides myself to think about. If I had a mother or a sister, it would be different, I suppose. Well, Darthea seemed to me to be just what I needed that way. She and her aunt are pretty poor, and they thought that I was well fixed and didn't mind letting me do little things to help us all have a good time—like going to tea at the Pré Catelan or having a picnic on the river or something of that sort. It never amounted to anything and we had a lot of fun. And that was one reason why I never told 'em that I was a clerk in a shoe store. I was afraid they might think I was spending more than I could afford. But let me tell you I was never so happy in my life, and why? Just because I had somebody beside myself to think about. But there was never any love. We've always been just good friends."

"I understand," said Ruth. "And you feel now as if some of your family had gone back on you through no fault of yours. Well, do you know what I would do in your place?"

"No," said Ruggles. "That's just what I want to find out."

"Well," said Ruth slowly, "I would put these two women 'way in the back of my mind, and work hard for the day to come when they'd be mighty glad to resume their friendship with me. I'm pretty sure that day will come, and so are you. All you've got to do now is to make good, do you understand? You've got your future pretty well marked out. Think of that. You expect to get the managership of this Vienna branch, and you certainly deserve it. After that you may get the managership of Austria, and perhaps in time the managership of all of Europe, and then of the whole Continent, and then perhaps the whole thing. You're young, and you know the business, and you're going to know it a lot better before you get through. Don't let a little thing like this get in your way."

Ruggles' face glowed.

"You're right, Miss Downing," said he. "After all, the company's the main thing."

"Don't let any silly woman put you off," said Ruth. "Remember that you've got to get on. You owe it to yourself and to the company. You're not like so many men in your position who merely work for the sake of their salary and have their minds always on some girl or foolishness of that sort. Tell me something"—she fastened Ruggles suddenly with her deep, violet eyes—"and tell me the truth. In your room—have you got pictures of Darthea stuck up all over the place?"

Ruggles shook his head with a smile.

"No," he answered, "I haven't a single picture of *her*."

"Nor of any other girl?" She paused and watched the color mounting under Ruggles' clear skin.

"I've got some pictures of *you*," said he.

"Of *me*!" Ruth exclaimed.

"Yes. They're just prints I cut out of illustrated papers. I've had them ever since you made your début, a couple of years ago. You don't mind, do you?" He regarded her anxiously.

"I—don't know," said Ruth slowly, and gave him a very intent look. "Have you any pictures of other women? Stage people—or celebrities?"

Ruggles' shocked look amounted almost to indignation.

"Of course not!" he answered. "Do you think I'd put things like that on my walls beside *your* pictures?" His face flushed.

"I beg your pardon," said Ruth softly. "But why did you want my pictures in your room?"

"Well," said Ruggles, "I've always been mighty interested in your family, naturally. When Dick was in college, I always kept track of what he did in athletics. I've got some bully pictures of him putting the shot. And I've got

some of your father, and the yacht, and your country place. You see, it was sort of like having a family of my own to keep track of. So when I came across these pictures of you, I naturally added them to my collection—but I liked some of them so much that I tacked them up on my walls," he added naively. "They seemed to make my little place more homelike." He glanced anxiously at Ruth and was a bit disturbed at the curious expression of her face and the fluttering of her long, dark lashes. "I hope you don't mind?" said he.

"No—I—don't mind," Ruth answered, and rose suddenly to her feet. "Excuse me for a minute, please."

She slipped out of the room, leaving poor Ruggles rather bewildered and wondering if she were displeased at the warm personal interest he had expressed in her family and herself. But he was not kept long in suspense, for a moment later she returned and handed him a photograph of herself in evening dress, which he recognized at once as the original of his half tone of her as a *débutante*. Receiving this with the emotions of a novice at his consecration, Ruggles' suddenly dimmed eyes discovered that it was inscribed: "To Mr. Ruggles, with the best wishes of Ruth Downing."

"That was Dick's picture," said Ruth, with a breathless little laugh. "But it's yours now. He went off and forgot it, so he deserves to lose it. I don't carry them in stock." She laughed again.

Ruggles could scarcely trust himself to speak.

"There's no danger of my ever going off and forgetting it," said he, almost inaudibly. "Thank you—ever so much. I guess I won't worry much about— You've helped me more than—more than anybody else ever did, Miss Downing. I—"

"Wait a minute!" said Ruth. "I'll wrap it up for you."

She disappeared again, to return immediately with a piece of wrapping paper in which she hastily enveloped the portrait and handed it to Ruggles, who took it like one in a trance.

"Good-by, Miss Downing," said he.

Ruth gave him her hand.

"Don't forget to let me know how you succeed," she said. "We're leaving to-morrow after lunch for London and Liverpool. Good-by and good luck, Mr. Ruggles."

Ruggles walked back to Passy with the rhythmic step and glazed eyes of a somnambulist. He did not awake from his trance until his buxom Swiss landlady handed him a letter with an apologetic smile.

"It came this morning, Mr. Ruggles," said she, "but Josef was careless and slipped it under the door of our new boarder. He does not get up until noon, so the error was not discovered."

Ruggles thanked her and took the letter, and as he glanced at the heading of the envelope, his heart, already sorely taxed, gave a sudden bound. Here, at last, were the long-expected official orders to go to Vienna and take command of the new store. What a pity, he thought, that Josef had been so careless! With this letter in his pocket, how much better equipped he would have been to talk to Miss Chaland and Darthea! But, after all, it was not the fault of the company. The company had done its part and backed up his claims as he had known all the time that the company would.

He hurried to his room and, standing with his back to the last rays of the autumn sunset, tore open the envelope and read as follows:

MR. RICHARD P. RUGGLES.

DEAR SIR: We regret to inform you that we find ourselves unable to offer you the managership of the new branch store of the Walkeasy Shoe Company at Vienna.

For such an appointment, we find it preferable to assign, when possible, a person

thoroughly conversant with the business methods and language of the country in which the store is situated. Inasmuch as Mr. Max Lorenz, recently employed in the Paris store, appears to possess the necessary requirements, besides having been formerly employed in a rival establishment and being therefore well acquainted with the trade, it has been found preferable to appoint him as manager of the new Vienna branch.

We assure you that your application will remain open to our consideration, and no doubt, in the event of another European branch store being established at a later date, we may be able to offer you the desired opportunity. Yours very truly,

B. F. HASTINGS,
EUROPEAN GENERAL MANAGER W. S. Co.

CHAPTER VIII.

There are times in the lives of most of us when the whole universe seems to become one big, cruel practical joke of which we are the helpless, undeserving victims.

Ruggles was naturally convinced that Lorenz had taken advantage of his early confidence to go to work deliberately to get his promotion away from him. Lorenz would probably never have thought of trying for the managership of the Vienna branch had he not learned from Ruggles of the ready response to his application.

But that which ate like acid into Ruggles' soul was the fact that the company had not given him due notice that his own claims were being contested. The company had not played fair, and for Ruggles to feel that the company had not played fair was akin to the conviction of an ardent patriot that his country has betrayed him.

His first emotion, after the primary shock had passed, was a profound sense of injury, not directed against Lorenz or even the company, but against his shattered ideals. His next thought was of what this disappointment meant to him as concerned the present conditions of his life. He was still no more than he had ever been—an insignificant little

shoe clerk, the limit of whose importance in the social scheme of things was to unlace and remove muddy shoes from feet not always tidy, and to smile ingratiatingly up into the faces of the proletariat.

For the first time in his life he was seized with a loathing of his occupation. Darthea was right; Miss Chaland was right; Ruth was right. It was a rotten, humiliating job! He wondered that he had never seen it in this way before. It did not occur to him that he had not done so because he had always regarded the business in its larger light—as a great commercial affair of which he was a humble, but necessary unit. A private soldier, an orderly, cleaning the boots of his superior on active service, does not think of himself as a valet; he thinks of himself as a soldier. In currying a horse, he does not think of himself as a groom; he thinks of himself as a soldier, and his self-respect is not impaired. Ruggles had thought of himself as a soldier, a private in the invading army of American trade. He was not the servant of the public to whom he sold shoes; he was not the servant of the great industrial organization which was destined to carry its country's flag to where East becomes West and West East. He was nobody's servant. He was an enlisted man in the great army of American commerce and as such entitled to his chevrons.

It never entered Ruggles' head to go to Ruth in his distress. Neither did he seriously consider an appeal to Mr. Downing. A private soldier with a sense of wrong might look to his colonel for redress, but he would scarcely think of trying to carry the matter to his king or president or minister or secretary of war. Had Dick Downing been in Europe, Ruggles might have turned to him for counsel, but Dick was in America. However, that was not the point. Ruggles did not want the

benefit of personal influence from the seats of the mighty. He wanted merely a square deal from the company as the company. He considered his relations with the Downings—especially after his call on Ruth—as social rather than professional, so far as his humble part was concerned. He wanted no crumbs falling from the tables of the rich. All he wanted was a *square deal*!

It is possible that if Ruggles had not gone to Ruth for advice in regard to his personal affairs, he might have taken his grievance in both hands and shown it to Mr. Downing, senior; in which case it is most probable that his wrongs would have been investigated and justice done. Mr. Downing had lost his health in the examining of just such conditions, and was cheerfully prepared to die in the same harness. But Ruggles could not do that. Mr. Downing was Mr. Downing, the president of the company and a great man, but the company that he administered was far greater than he, just as a nation is always far greater than its chief executive. It was the company that was responsible to him for the injustice done; not Mr. Downing or Ruth or Dick.

It seemed to Ruggles that he had given his allegiance to an octopus, a merciless, man-grinding machine of which the human toilers were mere cogs to be worn ragged and flung onto the scrap heap. There was his father, whose machines had earned millions for the company and who had never received over two hundred dollars a month. Damn the company! Curse the company! Ruggles grabbed up his hat and rushed out.

Forgetting his dinner, he wandered the streets aimlessly until ten o'clock, then went back to his room and to bed. He would work no longer for any greedy, soulless, treacherous combination of liars that could so treat a man! He determined to throw up his job the

following day, draw the three thousand and odd francs which represented the savings of many years and which were deposited in a French bank, then take the first steamer for New York, where he would hunt up some work of an entirely different character.

Ruggles, in spite of his youth and glowing health, slept badly that night. His dreams were ugly and confused. He thought that Lorenz, with the face of a rat, was leaning over his bed and trying to gnaw his feet. He struck at him in his sleep and knocked over his *table-de-nuit*. About dawn he fell into a heavy, sluggish sleep and did not awake until nine o'clock. Then he got up, took his sponge bath, dressed with care, and walked slowly down into Paris. Before going to the store, he called at the bank, drew out his balance, and told the cashier that he was going away.

His mood had changed in the last few hours, and he found himself, instead of being sad, in a state of savage, smoldering resentment. It had occurred to him that, besides Lorenz, the manager of the store, whom he had always considered a good friend, had acted treacherously. He must have known what Lorenz was up to, but he had failed to put Ruggles on his guard. Ruggles decided to tell Durand what he thought of him. He felt that he would enjoy an interview with Lorenz, also, but reflected that the Austrian had probably left Paris for Vienna. His packing of the morning before would indicate immediate departure. This also explained his surly, inhospitable conduct. Ruggles reflected that Lorenz had felt that he had served him a dirty trick and was on the defensive.

"I'd like to meet him out on the road somewhere," said Ruggles to himself. "He may be twice my size, but I'll bet I could give him something besides shoes to think about for a couple of days. Durand, too."

It was about ten o'clock when he entered the store, where the first person on whom his eyes happened to fall was the young English surgeon of the British Red Cross whom he had met the previous morning on the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and who was in the act of purchasing a pair of high hunting boots. He did not see Ruggles, who, not wishing to disturb him, passed to the other side of the shop, where he came upon the manager and Lorenz, standing at the door of the office engaged in conversation.

Ruggles' eyes, red-rimmed from lack of sleep, blazed up at the sight, and he could feel the blood pumping into his head. His mouth seemed suddenly to become hot and dry and his muscles to tighten. He had no desire to make a scene, especially as there was a fair sprinkling of customers in the place for that early hour, and his years of training had made polite shop manners almost a second nature with him. But the sight of these two men who had so traitorously used him awakened in his system some quality long latent, which now came boiling up and imperiously demanding expression.

Durand caught sight of Ruggles as he approached. Perhaps at the same time he saw trouble in the congested eyes, for the pink color faded from his sleek face. But he looked at Ruggles with cold disapproval.

"Why are you so late?" he demanded, in his excellent English. "We have had some customers who have been kept waiting."

"Oh, have you?" Ruggles answered. "Then what's the matter with Lorenz waiting on them?" And he glared beligerently at his enemy, whose saturnine face had become suddenly venomous. It suggested, in fact, the face of a rat, a large, combative, cornered rat. Ruggles recalled his dream, which did not go far to help the situation.

"Mr. Lorenz is going away," said

Durand. "He is going to Vienna to take the managership of our new store, which is to open this week."

"Oh, is he?" Ruggles' voice was ominously calm. "That must be the position that was promised to me. How did the company happen to give it to Lorenz?"

The Austrian stepped forward, his eyes dancing with malicious triumph. He was half a head taller than Ruggles, broad of shoulder and long of limb.

"They gave it to me because there was nobody so fit to take it," he snapped.

"Then the company must be in a mighty bad fix," said Ruggles contemptuously, and turned to the manager. "I just dropped in to tell you what I thought of you," said he, and his voice, though not loud, had a suppressed intensity that carried to every corner of the shop, the words being distinctly audible.

Clerks serving customers stopped plying their shoe-horns and looked up, startled. Customers twisted about in their chairs, among them the British surgeon, who instantly recognized Ruggles as the nicely spoken young chap who had given him the newspaper the previous morning. Ruggles, in his cold, contemptuous anger, did not observe the effect he was producing. Without raising his voice, he went on speaking, his blue eyes, now almost black from restrained anger, fastened intently on the brown ones of the manager, who had turned suddenly very white.

"You knew that I was trying for this, Durand," said he, "and you promised to help me get it, didn't you?"

"Come," said the manager, his voice trembling, for the look in Ruggles' face frightened him, "we will not discuss that now."

"Yes, we will, though," Ruggles answered. "You indorsed my letter to

the European general manager and promised to help me all you could. Then, like a fool, I told Lorenz what I was after——"

"That is it," Lorenz interrupted with a scowl. "You played the fool. You have only yourself to thank."

Ruggles' blond head turned quickly on his straight shoulders, and he looked through narrowed lids at the scowling Austrian.

"I'll talk to you in a minute, Lorenz," said he. "I have a few words to say to Durand first. You lied to me," he went on to the manager, who was struggling hard for self-possession. "You lied to me like a dirty sneak, and you know it. You kept me in the dark about what was going on, and backed Lorenz for all you were worth. What did you get for it, anyhow?"

"I will not listen to you!" spluttered Durand. "You have been drinking and——"

"You lie! You know it. A man that would play the trick you have isn't fit to sell sabots to a street cleaner. As for Lorenz, here, he—he——"

"You have said enough," snarled the Austrian. He had some bitter Hungarian blood in his veins and, though cruel and treacherous, he was no coward. "Go out and do not make a scene."

Trusting to the supremacy of some forty pounds of bone and muscle over Ruggles' weight, he seized the boy so fiercely by the right arm near the shoulder that his strong fingers sank almost to the bone.

The next instant Lorenz felt as if a wiry mountain mule had planted its hind hoof directly under his left ear. He loosed his grip and spun around on his heels; then, before he could recover his balance—*smash!*—and the other hoof had been planted in the cavernous socket of his right eye. Back he went, smashing one of the

company's chairs in his fall. He scrambled to his feet and, glimpsing Ruggles through a swirling haze, rushed blindly at him with the mad intention of bearing him down by sheer superiority of size and rending him limb from limb. But Ruggles, though all aflame with the exhilaration of the first violence of his hitherto peaceful life, stuck strictly to the instincts of his Anglo-Saxon blood, and, as Lorenz flung his big, gaunt body upon him, he side-stepped and planted a vicious blow in the other eye. Then, the momentum of his antagonist being partly checked, he leaped nimbly in and delivered so neat an uppercut on the pointed Magyar chin that Lorenz lost the tip of his tongue and spent many subsequent hours in a dental parlor.

That finished the fight, so far as Lorenz was concerned, for he sank limply to the floor, where mingled strains of Austrian and Magyar blood made an unsightly stain on the company's handsome carpet. It might have finished the fight for Ruggles, also, and resulted in his being swiftly conducted to the police station by three or four *agents de police*, had not Durand lost his head. Excited beyond thought or reason by the shocking scene that had arisen in his polite shoe parlor, he hurled himself upon Ruggles, who received him almost with love. Durand had no distinct idea of what he meant to do, but there was no doubt in Ruggles' mind as to his own intentions in regard to Durand. He gave him a straight jab where nose and forehead meet, and another chair was added to the list of casualties.

At this, the cashier, to whose horror-stricken eyes it seemed as if a god had been smitten in his presence, leaped from his desk, upsetting his inkpot over the ledger, capsized the book-keeper in his passage, and dashed through his door like a falcon unhooded. Ruggles saw him coming, met

him just outside the threshold, and sent him back into his coop, door and all, where he fell across the typewriter, adding this and a large pane of art-nouveau glass with a beautiful design of lotus flowers to the profit-and-loss account of the company.

By this, the spirit of strife having taken charge of Ruggles' awakened soul, his blazing eyes darted this way and that, searching out the next candidate for belligerent honors. They fell upon Durand, who had struggled to his feet. There was nothing bellicose in the bearing of Durand, but Ruggles was now too far amuck to discriminate and started for him. Durand did not await the onslaught. With wonderful dexterity for a corpulent young man whose nose had been broken, he leaped over the legs of a semiparalyzed customer, hurdled a stool, and darted around the double row of chairs, with Ruggles in swift pursuit. They made the complete circuit, and then Ruggles doubled craftily. But Durand was not to be caught napping, and the chase reversed itself. The corpulent Durand, light on his feet as a dancing master, gained the foot of the stairs leading up to the ladies' department. Ruggles pursued him halfway up. Then, catching sight of a swooning saleswoman at the head of the stairs, he descended slowly, glaring up from the foot like a terrier who has treed a cat. He was panting hard, but his head was beginning to clear a little.

It was during this instant of pause that the door swung open and Ruth Downing entered. Ruggles did not see her, but she saw Ruggles, and at sight of his wild face, bloodshot eyes, and bleeding knuckles, she stepped back with a little gasp of dismay. Her startled eyes fell upon the wreckage, and her ears were greeted by hysterical cries from the rear of the shop and the top of the stairs. The much bebut-toned little page who officiated as St.

Peter to the Walkeasy Elysium, and who alone of all the personnel had stood fast, unforgetful of the responsibilities of his position, steered her gently into a quiet corner.

"Pardon, madame, on se bat"—
"There's been a fight"—said he politely.

Ruth did not attempt to contradict him. The shop gave every evidence of it. In the rush of her final shopping, she had taken time to drop into the store to tell Ruggles that, on talking to her father, she had heard of the appointment of an Austrian to the management of the Vienna branch, but that Mr. Downing had promised her that Ruggles should have the same position in a much more elaborate store to be opened very shortly in Rome.

Consequently, she was considerably taken aback by the spectacle presented to her vision. As she stood there, dazed and astonished, she saw a handsome man of a distinguished air rise quietly from his chair and lay his hand on Ruggles' shoulder. Ruggles appeared to recognize him, for he turned quickly with clenched fist, ready to strike, then let his arm fall, with a gasp that was half a sob.

"Come, old chap," said the stranger soothingly. "You've done quite enough damage. Chuck it now and come with me. I've got a taxi waiting."

He steered Ruggles through the open door, which was swung wide by the small page.

CHAPTER IX.

"*Café de Madrid—et marchez vite,*" said Ruggles' friend, and slammed the door of the taxi behind him.

Ruggles sat staring straight in front of him until they had crossed the Place de la Concorde. Then he suddenly dropped his face into his hands. The doctor reached into his side pocket, drew out a well-seasoned pipe, which he stuffed from his tobacco pouch, and,

leaning back in his seat, smoked tranquilly. He did not so much as glance at Ruggles as they spun up the Champs Elysées.

Ruggles got himself in hand before the Etoile was reached. He mopped his face with his handkerchief and turned to look at his companion.

"Say, doctor," said Ruggles, "why did you do that?"

"Haul you out of the mess? Because I heard the whole thing and liked your methods, old chap. That German brute forced it on you. He had it over you a good three stone, too. You *did* give him pepper! And those other cads, too!" He chuckled. "You're pretty useful in a scrap, aren't you?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Ruggles wearily. "When I went in there, the last thing in my mind was a rough-house. But I just couldn't help it."

"I gathered that," answered the doctor. "What a bee-utiful row it was, anyhow!" He laughed.

But it was no laughing matter for Ruggles. He decided that beneath his polite exterior he must be possessed of the soul of an Apache. What would Ruth think when she heard of his violence? What would Dick and Mr. Downing think—and Darthea and Miss Challand, and other friends and acquaintances who had always regarded him as an eminently respectable and gentlemanly person? Darthea was right. She had not considered that a person of his position was a fit associate—and circumstances appeared to have proved that Darthea's estimate was accurate. Ruggles felt that he had acted like what he would have called a "thug," and was no longer entitled to the respect of any decent person, least of all his own.

Consequently, he was a good deal surprised when this kind-hearted young Englishman, who had come to his rescue at the critical moment, pulled his pipe from his mouth and said briefly:

"I know just how you feel. I felt the same way once, after I'd lost my temper in a shop on the Strand and chucked everything out of the windows. Only I hadn't half your excuse. I saw red merely because they gave me some cheek. I chased the shopkeeper into the cellar. Made an awful ass of myself. All the same, I never regretted it. The beggars need a straightenin' out once in a time."

Ruggles nodded, rather absently. He felt forced to admit to himself that his friend in need, for all of his charm, must be a rather tough sort of fellow. Glancing at the Englishman's hands, he observed that they were hard and roughened as if from sun or some caustic agent. His face, too, was weather-beaten; the sort of face one would expect to find on a cowboy rather than on a surgeon of the Red Cross. He began to have his doubts whether his friend was what he represented. Had he been, he would scarcely have bothered himself about Ruggles. Nobody had ever done so before unless he had an ax to grind—and Ruggles suddenly bethought himself of the considerable sum of money reposing in his breast pocket.

"Say," he asked, "where are we going, anyhow?"

The doctor smiled.

"I thought we'd go out to the Madrid and get a bite," said he. "I lunched there yesterday, and they gave me some chow that wasn't half bad."

Ruggles' worst suspicions were confirmed. He knew the Madrid as one of the fashionable restaurants of the city. Why should a stranger ask him to lunch at the Madrid? There must be something behind it all.

"I think I'd rather get out here and go back to where I live, if you don't mind," said he. "I'm not feeling very well."

The doctor smiled.

"If I'm any judge of symptoms," said he, "your chief trouble at just this moment is hunger. This thing has got on your nerves, and you've not been eatin' as you ought—what?"

"Oh, I was never much of an eater," Ruggles answered uneasily.

"Yes, you are. Any man that can hit out as you can is a good eater. Come now, you're my guest, of course—and we're almost there."

Ruggles did not have the force to protest further. Besides, as the doctor said, they had almost arrived. The taxi turned into the gardens of the café and halted, and Ruggles stepped out after his host. The first person on whom his eyes fell was a Mr. Falconer, an elderly retired English clergyman whom Ruggles had often met at Darthea's. He was in the act of giving some directions to his chauffeur, his car having entered directly before that of Ruggles and his host.

Mr. Falconer was with a friend, a gentleman whose years approached his own. Ruggles hoped that he might escape without recognition, considering the fact that he was in the company of a man whose name he did not know, but who was, Ruggles was becoming more and more convinced, not at all what he represented himself. A doctor, Ruggles had thought, as they had spun uptown in the taxi, would have been prompt to offer his services to Lorenz, who, as far as he was able to recall, had appeared to be in a very serious condition. A doctor of the British Red Cross, particularly, would scarcely have assisted a stranger in escaping justice. No, the man was very obviously a fraud.

But Mr. Falconer's keen eyes had already caught sight of Ruggles, for Mr. Falconer had a lifelong habit of looking at a great many people almost at the same time and remembering their names. Then, as his quick glance rested on Ruggles' companion, his genial face

broke into smiles and he came forward with outstretched hand.

"Pembroke, my dear fellow!" said he. "This is indeed a pleasure! And Mr. Ruggles—delighted to see you!" He turned to his friend. "Sir Henry, perhaps you have already met Lord Pembroke, who is on his way to the Porte under the auspices of the Red Cross. And this is Mr. Ruggles. Sir Henry Stafford," said he, beaming at Ruggles and wondering inwardly how in the name of all that was conventional he happened to be lunching at the Madrid with John Willoughby, seventh Earl of Pembroke.

Ruggles was not required to say much, which was fortunate for Ruggles. Lord Pembroke made a few pleasant remarks, and then they separated to find their tables. Ruggles followed his host, his head in a whirl.

"Lord Pembroke!" he muttered to himself. "Phew!"

"Better have a wash and brush up," said Pembroke. "You skinned your knuckles on the big blighter. I must say, though, you got out of it awfully well. The last row I was in, I managed to swim clear somehow, but I wasn't pretty to look at for a few days. That was out in Sydney. I've been in Australia for the last ten years. Only came back to inherit when my older brother died a few months ago." He thrust his strong hands under the faucet for a moment, then picked up a towel. "So you know old Falconer? Nice old bird! Got me out of lots of scrapes when I was a nipper. He was our vicar. Then his uncle died and left him a pot of money. Glad of it."

"He's certainly a fine old gentleman," Ruggles answered.

"Well," said Pembroke, "come out in the garden as soon as you're ready. I'll go order our chow."

He went out, and Ruggles stood for a moment staring into the glass.

"Lord Pembroke! Lord Pembroke!"

he repeated to himself. "And I was beginning to think he might be some sort of a con man!"

It swept over Ruggles that he was still very callow and inexperienced in regard to this world and the people in it. Also, he began to wonder if all men were as free and equal as his American principles had led him to maintain. Up to this time he had never been able to understand why he should not consider himself as good as anybody else, and now for the first time it occurred to him that perhaps he had taken far too much for granted.

The Downings were his superiors, and so were Darthea and her aunt and Mr. Falconer and Pembroke. The rectors of the American and English churches were also of this higher order, to which it now seemed to Ruggles, in his reaction, that he could never hope to attain.

When he rejoined his host, the latter was seated at a table in the garden, cheerfully engaged in ordering their repeat. Ruggles declined the offer of a cocktail, but when the hors d'œuvres were served, he quickly discovered how badly he was in need of food. A filet of sole, followed by a juicy steak, went far toward restoring him to his normal self. Pembroke was hungry, too, and neither had much to say until the coffee was served. Then Pembroke lighted a cigar, leaned back in his chair, and, looking at Ruggles, whose execution of the delicious luncheon he had been observing with kindly approval, asked with a smile:

"Feelin' better, old chap?"

"I certainly am," Ruggles answered. "I was hungrier than I thought. You see I've had a lot of things bothering me for the last couple of days and I haven't thought much about eating."

"So I imagined," Pembroke answered. "You looked pretty well gone. Do you think they'll try to make it nasty for you down there?"

Ruggles shook his head.

"I don't believe so," he answered. "Lorenz might, but he's got to go to Vienna to-day. Durand, the manager, will probably try to hush the thing up, if only for his own sake."

"What are you goin' to do now?"

"I don't know," Ruggles answered slowly. "I got a little money saved up and I thought I might go back to New York. I've had enough of this town. You see, it's not only losing my job," he went on, with a rather heightened color, "but only the day before, I got turned down by a girl I thought a whole lot about."

"No, really? I say, that is tough! What was the trouble, if you don't mind my asking?"

"I'd like to tell you about it," said Ruggles. "You've been mighty kind to me. But it's a long story, and as you're leaving to-night, you must have a lot of things you want to do and see."

Pembroke glanced at his watch.

"I've got an hour yet," said he. "Tell me all about it. I might be able to help you. We medicos are often able to give advice that isn't purely physical."

Ruggles looked gratefully at the kindly, interested face of his host. It struck him that Pembroke was a considerably older man than he had at first thought. The fresh, but rugged skin had certain lines of experience, and the crisp chestnut hair that curled above the small, closely set ears was flecked with gray. Ruggles decided that his host must be nearer forty than thirty. A sudden curiosity possessed him to know more of this strong, kindly man. "What is it?" asked Pembroke, noting the look of inquiry.

Ruggles colored.

"I was just thinking," said he, "that it seems sort of funny that you should be a doctor when you're an English lord."

"That's easily explained. You see, in England the oldest son inherits after

the death of the father. 'When my father died, my elder brother inherited the title and the estates. Rather than rot around at home, I went out to Australia and scratched for myself. I had a sheep ranch for a while, then tried gold diggin', and finally went down to Melbourne and studied medicine. Surgery had always interested me, so I went in for that, and I had quite a decent little practice when my brother died. Now I'm goin' out for the Red Cross, and unless I'm much mistaken, there'll be a lot of work to do, once they get at it in real earnest. But about this affair of yours?'

Ruggles finished his coffee and set down the cup.

"Well," said he, "it was like this, Lord——"

"Call me 'doctor,'" said Pembroke. "I like it better. You see, anybody might become a peer by virtue of birth or circumstance or because of—oh, a lot of things. But a man has to make himself a surgeon."

"Well, then," said Ruggles, "it was like this." And in his simple, frank, and often slangy speech, he proceeded to put Pembroke in possession of all the facts connected with his unfortunate affair. Pembroke lighted a fresh cigar and leaned back in his chair to listen. He was a man who loved his fellow men, loved to help and direct them, and his experience of human nature in the raw as well as in the finished product was considerable. He was the more eminently fitted to grasp the situation because the social conditions of life in Australia so closely approach those of the United States in many ways.

It did not take Ruggles long to tell his story, scarcely a quarter of an hour, in fact; the more so as he had so little to say about himself. Pembroke observed this trait in him with particular appreciation, realizing its rarity. Ruggles finished his narrative and looked hopefully at Pembroke.

"It's funny," said Ruggles, "how much good it seems to do a fellow to get a thing like this off his chest. Why, doctor, when you come to think of it, these people are 'way up out of my class. Now that I'm beginning to see it that way, it isn't so hard. I didn't understand, that's all."

Pembroke blew out a column of smoke and regarded him thoughtfully.

"No," he admitted, "you weren't precisely in the same class, from the European point of view. I happen to know something about the family. This Miss Challand must be one of the Norfolk Challands; all poor as Job, or Lazarus—or whoever it was that was so rotten poor—and proud as Lucifer. The Westbrookes are an old county family, too. Chuck it all. That's my advice to you."

But Ruggles scarcely heard this admonition, for he was in the grip of a sudden inspiration that had fallen upon him like a bolt from the blue. It was a wonderful thought and inspired of the disinterested kindness which had been so spontaneously offered him in his hour of need. Many a homeless and ill-treated dog has been similarly inspired by sympathy from the casual pedestrian; and it has happened that the dog has followed its protector home and later laid down its life in defense of the family or goods of the one to whom its allegiance has been offered. Ruggles leaned forward, his eyes bright and a flush on his lean cheeks.

"Say, doctor, you're going out there to the Balkans to work for the Red Cross. Can't you take me with you? I don't know anything about the job, but I'd manage to make good."

Pembroke took his cigar from his lips, and his keen eyes first examined the eager blue ones looking into his, then ran over Ruggles' trim, well-made figure, resting lastly on the boy's flushed, earnest face. What he saw ap-

peared to please him, but he hesitated a moment before answering.

"Our corps—or at least my unit of it—is full," said he slowly. "There's not a vacancy left." Then, seeing the cloud of disappointment that this statement produced, he added reflectively: "Still, it might be managed somehow, if you really want it so badly. I could take you on as my orderly."

"That for mine!" cried Ruggles.

"There wouldn't be much in it for you," said Pembroke. "Small pay and a good chance of dyin' of fever or cholera or possibly a piece of shrapnel. I fancy I'll be rather in the thick of things."

"You won't have to get out a search warrant to find me, if you are," Ruggles answered.

"No—considering what I've seen of your methods, I don't believe I would."

"I don't give a hang about what I draw," said Ruggles eagerly. "I've got a little money, and I'll pay my own way out, if you like. All I want is to get away from here and do something that's worth while."

"There's no trouble about either of those things," Pembroke answered. "But you see, Ruggles, it would mean that you would be my personal servant. You'd have to look after my things, and turn to at any time at any job that might happen to come along. How does that strike you?"

"Me for it!" said Ruggles fervently.

Pembroke laid down his cigar and leaned back in his chair.

"Well," said he, "in that case you're on. Meet me with your duffle at the Gare de Lyons at nine o'clock to-night."

CHAPTER X.

It was a bitter cold night in mid-winter, with a fierce gale driving in from the Black Sea. The intense darkness was alternated by periods of vivid light, as the moon cut its way like a

silver scimitar through the hurrying masses of snow-filled clouds.

All about the swamps of Derkos and on the ragged line that ran beyond Tschataldscha, the Ottoman army was making its last stand. There were no camp fires, for there was little to burn and nothing to cook. There was a dearth of everything of which an army stands in need—pure water, food, shelter, clothing, and, worst of all, faith; the last a greater loss to the host of Islam than all the rest.

Not far behind the outer line was a little Turkish village, and here in the crude barracks Pembroke and Ruggles toiled and labored with the sick and wounded brought in from the firing line.

An orderly came in, saluted Pembroke, and delivered a verbal message. Pembroke turned to Ruggles.

"The colonel's going to visit the outposts and wants me to go along," said he. "I've got all I can swing to, here. Hop on my pony and tell him I sent you in my place. If you see many sick lyin' about, ask for a detail to bring them to the hospital. Pick out the ones that seem to have some show."

"All right, sir," said Ruggles, and went out into the court, where a shaggy pony was hitched to a blasted pomegranate tree in the shelter of the mud wall. He mounted and rode toward headquarters, where he fell in with Colonel Hamid Pasha and his staff, who were already in the saddle and about to start on their rounds.

"Is that you, Pembroke?" asked the colonel, in excellent English.

"No, sir," answered Ruggles. "It's Doctor Pembroke's orderly. He couldn't leave, so he sent me in his place."

"Very well," said the colonel, and gave the order to march.

The little cavalcade turned to face the wintry blast that swept down gusty and freezing cold from the snow-clad

steppes. The outposts were visited in turn and the party soon found itself on the extreme left of the line, where the Turkish trenches were less than the distance of a pistol shot from those of the enemy.

The sentries were inspected, and the party was about to withdraw, when the moon, which had been for the last half hour obscured, bored through the flying cloud mass and blazed down upon the bayonets of a dark body of men swarming up the slope toward the Turkish trench. The colonel raised himself in his stirrups.

"Halt!" he cried. "Who goes there?"

His challenge came too late. Although the famished and exhausted Turks roused themselves, prepared to defend their position with the stubbornness of their race, their scattering volley was unavailing. The trench stopped the rush no more than a ditch dug in the sand would stop the rush of a breaking wave. It was bayonet work and quickly over.

For a handful of men like the colonel's staff to try to check that raging flood was impossible, was suicidal. The colonel gave a sharp order to retreat. But even as the words left his mouth, his Arab reared, plunged, and fell, pinning its rider beneath him. It is possible that Ruggles alone saw this, for the others were already in flight. The Bulgarians were almost upon them, but, hampered by their heavy accouterments and ankle-deep in the sandy mud, their progress was slower than it seemed. Ruggles saw, or thought he saw, a forlorn hope of saving Colonel Hamid Pasha.

He flung himself to the ground and, still holding his reins, sprang to the side of the old man, who was struggling to free himself. But even as he reached him, the pony screamed, tore itself away, and dashed off into the darkness. Ruggles, light of foot, might have saved himself even then, but some instinct

stronger than his fear of death held him fast. He stooped over the colonel, gripped him under the shoulders, and dragged him to his feet.

Though theoretically a noncombatant, Ruggles, like Pembroke, carried a revolver, as among the Bulgarians were many who were no respecters of the Red Cross. As the rush bore down upon them, he began to fire.

Beside him, Hamid Pasha drew his sword, and almost as he did so, the two were in the thick of it. The brilliant moonlight glistened on the silvery head of the old Ottoman as he towered above his squat assailants, and blazed on Ruggles' golden head, as the pair, emblematic of East and West, stood side by side desperately defending themselves against the frenzied foresters from the beech woods about the Shipka Pass. The next instant, a heavy bank of cloud swept across the face of the moon, and the struggle went on in Stygian darkness.

Presently Hamid Pasha fell, and Ruggles found himself astride his prostrate body, a rifle in his hand, stabbing, parrying, lunging with the bayonet. A madness seemed to possess him. He was conscious of neither pain nor fear, though wounded in many places and surrounded by enemies who gave no quarter even to the dying. But it was a thinking, reasoning madness, an ancient inheritance, perhaps, from berserk ancestors. Strong, supple, quick of thought and action, he raged like a young wolf beset by a pack of clumsy curs, and when presently his bayonet was torn from its fixtures, he gripped the piece by the muzzle and lashed about him like a blond demon.

Then suddenly the moon gashed its way through the black curtain of cloud, and Ruggles saw vaguely that he had to do with but two of his enemies—the one a squat creature muffled to the chin in rags, the other an officer. Screaming with the hope of despair, he sprang

upon the former, struck his weapon aside, and dashed the butt of his rifle into the swart face. And then, as he flung himself upon the other, the moonlight struck upon the face of his antagonist, and Ruggles gave a cry of recognition. It was the Balkan gentleman to whom he had sold a pair of shoes in the Paris store.

"I know *you*!" he roared. "I'll send you where you won't need any shoes!"

The wavering call of Turkish bugles was borne down pulsating on the flaps of the gusty wind. There came a rattle of rifle fire, cries of "Allah! Allah!" and the rush of many feet. Ruggles did not hear. The moon blazed on his pallid face as he lay unconscious across the body of his late client, the Bulgarian gentleman.

CHAPTER XI.

On the sunny terrace of what had formerly been a royal palace on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus, an old man with snowy hair and beard and a skin the color of antique ivory reclined upon the silken cushions of his chaise-longue and listened with quiet pleasure to the verses of Swinburne that were being read aloud by his companion:

"The storm winds of ages
Blow through me and cease,
The war wind that rages,
The spring wind of peace."

There was a delicately perfumed spring wind wafting from Therapia across the straits, and Colonel Hamid Pasha prayed that it might be fraught with peace. No one glancing at the sere and yellow skin stretched like parchment over the lofty, benevolent features of the old man could doubt but that it would at least bring peace to him, for the coming change was written plainly there, and the dark, luminous eyes held that expression of slightly troubled curiosity sometimes to be seen in the eyes of a dying man or a prospective mother

whose hour is upon her. Yet they were serene, for the old Ottoman had been true to his God, his country, and himself, and felt that he had naught to fear.

"Read the 'Super Flumina Babylonis,' my son," said he. "I recall a stanza which has frequently been expressed in our poetry:

"On the mountains of memory, by the
world's wellsprings,
In all men's eyes,
Where the light of the life of him is on all
past things,
Death only dies."

At his elbow, Ruggles turned the pages of the beautiful copy of Swinburne's "Songs Before Sunrise," which an English friend of Hamid Pasha's, who knew the old Ottoman's love of poetry, had sent him from the limited edition. Like his host, Ruggles was propped in his chair with many cushions of silk and embroidery. A crutch lay at his side, and one foot was still enveloped in bandages. Ruggles was never to mount his wheel again, for a Bulgarian bullet had so shattered his ankle that only the skill of Lord Pembroke had prevented amputation, and the young man was destined to limp for the rest of his life. This wound, with three others, he had received in his desperate defense of Colonel Hamid Pasha.

Ruggles found the desired poem and read it slowly in his clear, pleasant voice. Hamid Pasha, to whom English and French were as familiar as his mother tongue, listened to the reading with quiet pleasure. Ruggles had a natural lingual facility and read with smoothness and expression. These exercises had been for several weeks a pleasant feature of their convalescence. Hamid Pasha's wound was in the liver and still open. Ruggles' had all healed, but Pembroke limited his physical activity.

Ruggles read on. He had developed

a love of poetry during his convalescence, and gave to his diction a lilting quality that his kindly host found most harmonious and soothing. . Hamid Pasha slept very little, but of recent days he had fallen more and more into the habit of long periods of semisomnolence, during which his body became numb while his mentality was clear and tranquil. It was the approaching dissolution between the physical and the spiritual, and Hamid Pasha knew it and was glad.

Now, as Ruggles read on, the old Osmanli Turk looked out across the vivid blue of the deep-flowing Bosphorus and thought of many things. No doubt his mind dwelt most upon his religion, which was of the orthodox faith of Islam, but not bigoted or, when all is said, particularly devout in outward demonstration. He prayed when it pleased him, and where, and the call of a muezzin from a minaret did not always bring him to his knees, for which he had been at times severely censured. Hamid Pasha was a free thinker and a man of the world. He found all religions good, and the lack of any more bestial and stupid than fraught with any especial danger of hell fire. For him, God was God, and while Mohammed was His prophet, it was quite possible that He might through the ages have found need of other prophets, such as Brahma and Confucius and Zoroaster and Jesus Christ.

Hamid Pasha was childless, and this fact had been the sorrow of his declining years. Earlier in life, he had taken wives in accordance with the laws of the Koran and Ottoman social custom, but these marriages proving unfruitful, he had divorced his womenkind, amply providing for them. He was enormously rich, having inherited estates in Egypt and stock in the Suez Canal. The Egyptian property he had converted into cash, which he had invested in British, African, American, and

other securities. Oddly enough, he was the holder of large blocks of American industrial stocks.

Hamid Pasha had never been a sensual man, but he was sensuous to the point of æstheticism. His pleasure lay in such things as the sight of his almond trees in full blossom, or the odor of the jessamine that clothed the columns surrounding his Persian fountain, whereof the basin was composed of ancient tiles each of which would have been found worthy of a glass case in a museum.

Keen of intelligence, learned, fearless in battle as a *bashi-bazouk*, gentle in his household, a poet at heart, and a man of deep, broad, fundamental religion—such was Hamid Pasha.

Mindful of this, one may better understand his position in regard to the four lovely girls who at this time inhabited his haremlik and whom he had taken as his adopted daughters. The kindly old Ottoman had chosen them with care, and destined them for better things than the semislavery of the orthodox Turkish woman. He had occupied himself with their education, and denied them nothing that it was good for them to have. Also, he had watched and guarded them with the care of a fond parent. They repaid him in affection and the pleasure which he took in their beauty and accomplishments.

Ruggles read on while Hamid Pasha listened, his eyes resting on the opposite European shore or wandering wearily from one to another of the brilliant notes in the broad panorama spread before him.

The terrace on which the two men sat was a charming retreat. Masses of wistaria rioted over the ancient walls, and to the right one glimpsed through a vista in the plane trees a flower garden which Hamid Pasha had surrendered to nature, an encroacher on his lordly domain for whom he had great tolerance. Hamid Pasha loved

his wild, happy little garden. He reserved it to himself and the nightingales that sang the night through from the great tree, now heavy with blossoms, which overspread the Persian fountain.

Ruggles finished his reading and laid aside his book. Hamid Pasha reached an emaciated hand to the inlaid taboret between them and touched a silver bell. A servant, awaiting the summons, appeared with a tray which held some tiny golden cups, a spirit-lamp, and coffee ground to an impalpable flour. Silent as a ghost, he prepared the decoction, served it, and withdrew.

They sipped their coffee without speaking. Then Hamid Pasha, student, scholar, and colonel in the Ottoman imperial army, and Ruggles, late salesman in the Paris branch of the Walk-easy Shoe Company of America, leaned back in their reclining chairs and watched the vivid life of the Bosphorus. Ruggles was the first to break the silence. He had sighted a small power boat with a Red Cross flag at her bow, bobbing about in the eddies close under the shore.

"Here comes Doctor Pembroke, sir," said he.

"Indeed? Ah, yes, quite so. I see the red cross." He touched his bell.

"Lord Pembroke is coming," he said to the servant who obeyed the summons.

"Yes, excellency," replied a hushed voice. "Mustapha is waiting at the landing."

CHAPTER XII.

Pembroke did not leave the palace that night.

All that was immortal of Hamid Pasha left it at sunrise, when he requested to be carried to a balcony, and there, after having quietly enjoyed the colors and odors of the dawn and listened to the song of the nightingale, remarked for the benefit of his soul—and those of others who might care to

listen—that there was no God but God; then went to meet this Deity, or one of His representatives.

"The Ottoman Empire and I are in a similar state," the old man had said to Ruggles, "and I am glad that I shall be spared the pain of witnessing the death agonies of my beloved country. It is God's will. It is kismet."

Hamid Pasha's last moments were as peaceful as those of a tired old man falling into a gentle sleep. Tears filled Ruggles' eyes as Pembroke described the end.

"And now, old chap," said Pembroke, in a brisker tone, "prepare yourself for a shock. I have some very wonderful news for you, and you might as well hear it from me now as later from the lawyers. The old gentleman has left you a pot of money."

Ruggles turned his head slowly to stare at him.

"What?" said he. "Left me a pot of money?"

"Just so. Roughly speakin', I should say you'd inherit about half a million pounds. My congratulations. I'm jolly glad."

Ruggles stared at him dumbly. Half a million pounds! In the neighborhood of two and a half million dollars— His face went suddenly pale, and he leaned back in his chair, breathing uncertainly.

"Among other things," went on Pembroke, in his pleasant, quiet voice, "this place is yours. I wouldn't count too much on that, however, as the nearest mosque, with the assistance of the imperial Ottoman treasury, is pretty apt to collar it. But the bulk of the old gentleman's estate can't be touched. He told me that it was principally in European and American investments, and in the safeguard of his London bankers. This palace, and a comparatively small balance in the Ottoman Bank, is all that he's got in Turkey. Hamid Pasha hadn't any too great confidence

in the commercial honesty of his compatriots. Come, now, buck up, or I'll have to give you a squirt of strychnine."

For Ruggles' face was still white and his eyes fixed and staring. He, Ruggles, a millionaire! The idea was incredible—almost terrifying. His brain could not grasp it.

"But why—why did he——"

"Why did he leave it to you? Oh, that's not such a hard one. You saved him from a rotten nasty death and came jolly near gettin' scragged yourself, doin' it. You sat tight when his own crowd bolted, and your Oriental isn't the chap to do things by halves when it comes to payin' off a score, whether on the credit or debit side of the slate. Then afterward, when he had you brought here, he got jolly fond of you, all outside the obligation. He had no heirs, and I fancy he was rather a lukewarm Mussulman, for all of his religious observances. Bit of a free thinker, Hamid Pasha was. Came from livin' so long in England, I presume. Well, feelin' better?"

The color was returning to Ruggles' hollow cheeks and a brightness was growing in his eyes. It was rather more than a brightness, in fact, for as Pembroke glanced at him critically, they filled with tears. It is probable that Ruggles was at this moment more affected by the kindness of his benefactor than at the thought of the great fortune to which he had so marvelously fallen heir.

"Oh, I feel well enough," he answered, trying to smile. "Just sort o'—sort o'——"

"Sort of flabbergasted," Pembroke supplied. "Don't blame you a bit. I was a bit bowled over myself this morning, about an hour before he died, when he gave me this."

He held out his strong, sinewy hand, and Ruggles saw upon the third finger such an emerald as might have ran-

somed a rajah. The great stone was flawless as a pool of the sea in a green grotto.

Pembroke reached into his inner pocket and drew out a letter.

"Hamid Pasha asked me to give you this," said he, and rose. "Got to be off, now. I'll run over from time to time and see how you're gettin' on. Good luck and congratulations and all that sort of thing. Remember, you're master here now, so give your orders."

He clapped his hands, and Mustapha came to conduct him to the landing. Ruggles, holding the letter in his trembling hands, leaned back in his chair and stared out across the shimmering straits.

"Me master here!" muttered Ruggles, under his breath. "Give my orders!"

He looked about at the gardens, then at the palace itself, and the sudden knowledge that it was all his, even though it were to be taken from him the next week, filled him less with pride and delight than with a certain sense of shyness. He felt as if the ancient walls and terraces were looking at him with a sort of contemptuous amusement as if to say:

"What, thou master here, thou flea from the belly of the raw and shaggy Western world? Thou master of us, these terraces from whose proud heights Osman I, the Victorious, first looked with conquering eyes on the ancient city of Constantinople? Thou master? *Mashallah*, go hide thyself in a hole!"

But aside from this sudden diffidence, there was another matter to which Ruggles' mind passed uncomfortably as he sat there holding Hamid Pasha's unopened letter, which for some reason he rather dreaded to read. Though Turkish etiquette had made the mention of such a matter impossible, Ruggles was strongly of the conviction that, despite his age, the kindly Turk had

maintained a harem. Of still nights there had come to his ears, from somewhere within the palace walls, the cadenza of mandolins, guitars, and other stringed instruments, together with rippling and musical laughter, which the distance had rendered elusively seductive.

When he had begun to walk about a little, Ruggles had once started down a path that led around the pasha's private garden through an avenue of pollards. He had gone some little distance when he had seen ahead a charming bungalow of considerable dimensions and Saracenesque architecture. Windows and veranda were closely latticed, and the whole was a bower of rose ramblers and grapevines. But when he had advanced halfway down the arbor, the white-clad, turbaned figure of a manservant of some description had slipped from the shrubbery and, with a polite salutation, had signified to him that he was trespassing. Ruggles, much confused, had retraced his steps, nor had he mentioned the incident to his host. He knew enough of Turkish domestic life to appreciate that there were in all such establishments as this precincts to which a guest was not supposed to penetrate.

Well, no doubt Hamid Pasha had made provision for his household. Ruggles decided that it was not worth while to fret himself over conditions of which he had been allowed to remain in ignorance. Possibly some instructions as to the future direction of the estate might be contained within the letter. He broke the wax seal and, with an emotion akin to awe, set himself to examine its contents. The communication was in English, carefully written in a fine, legible hand slightly irregular from weakness, and read as follows:

MY SON: These few words of farewell and invoking the blessing of God upon us all.

In this, the twilight of my earthly pil-

grimage, I have in my heart naught but the glory of God, peace toward all men, and the love of those who are dear to me.

Childless as I am, and appreciating your worth and the sacrifices you have made for me, I have seen fit to create you in part my heir. Such goods as have been vouchsafed me I leave in part to the servants of my religious creed, in part to my country, and in part to you. The representatives of my men of affairs will make this last behest quite clear to you.

Of that which I now enjoin upon you we have never spoken, because it was not fitting. There are at this moment, as a part of my household, four ladies who are to be considered as my adopted daughters, since as daughters they have always been to me. In the possible disruption of the Ottoman Empire there are bound to be many social changes. Whether or not Stamboul falls and my people are driven back into Asia, it is probable that the conditions of the past will be altered to conform with those of the Occident.

In making you one of my heirs, I have not been influenced alone by gratitude or the love which I bear you, but also because I have looked deeply into your soul and found it pure, honest, and unafraid. In these my last hours I have studied you deeply, my son, with the result that I can think of no person to whom I can with greater confidence intrust a sacred responsibility.

I commit to you, therefore, the care of these four maidens, with the injunction that you, as my son, conduct yourself toward them in all ways as should a brother. In this I feel that you will not fail.

My instructions are that you conduct them from this place, as soon as your health permits, to London, Paris, or such a city as your judgment finds suitable in the great Western world. It has been arranged that their instructress, a most worthy lady of your own nationality whom I obtained through the recommendation of the president of Robert College, shall assist you in the direction of their future welfare. All of the four are accomplished in Western languages and have been instructed in the conventions of Western society. Each is richly dowered in a financial sense for the forming of a possible matrimonial alliance. You yourself are the sole trustee of these estates.

In a word, my son, I wish these young ladies to be given the advantages and opportunities of the disenfranchised woman of the Occident. I am unable to endure the possibility of their becoming the inmates of

an Oriental harem. And I count upon your love for me and the loyalty which you have shown to a crippled cause and a crippled man to carry out faithfully this last behest.

So far as concerns your own inheritance, I need say nothing. All has been provided for and intrusted to honest and efficient agents. My lawyers will call upon you shortly after the performance of the final rites of this poor clay, and you have always our esteemed friend Lord Pembroke with whom to advise. I have bequeathed to him my steam yacht for the work of the Red Cross.

And now, as my hand grows weak and my eyes dim, while the shadows lengthen and the stars appear, I can but give you my blessing, my son, and commit you to the God of us all, Who is and always has been and always will be, God.

(signed) BEN ALI HAMID PASHA.

CHAPTER XIII.

It usually happens, for the better smelting of our souls, that when great wealth descends upon us, great responsibility goes with it. This is probably the reason why indolent philosophers have been for so many centuries given to the habit of decrying wealth.

Ruggles was neither indolent nor could he lay claim to being a philosopher; in spite of which, after reading Hamid Pasha's last message and considering the responsibility which the inheritance of his fortune enjoined, he could have found it in his heart to wish that he had been endowed with neither.

"Good heavens!" said he to himself. "Me guardian of four ladies just out of a Turkish harem! *Me!*"

A little later Mustapha Ali, the Turkish valet, came quietly to Ruggles' elbow.

"The American lady governess asks if you will receive her, effendi," said he, with the customary salute.

This must be the teacher from Robert College of whom Hamid Pasha had spoken in his letter.

"Certainly," Ruggles answered. "Ask her to come in, Mustapha."

There was a rustle in the doorway,

and, turning his head, Ruggles' rather frightened eyes beheld a most attractive personality. A young woman who appeared to be of about his own age, or perhaps a little older, came forward briskly, with a smile on her lips and a general expression of frank friendliness on her most attractive face. She was of medium height, rather fully rounded of hip and bosom, with a high, but wholesome coloring, and she appeared to radiate a general atmosphere of cheerful capability and energy. Her eyes were gray, with a mirthful expression, but clear, steady, and comprehending. Ruggles liked her immediately. She came forward without shyness or hesitation and offered him her hand, which Ruggles partly raised himself to take.

"How do you do, Mr. Ruggles?" said she, with a wide smile which revealed a double row of very white and even teeth. "I'm Miss Elliot, the young ladies' governess."

Ruggles was struck by the unusually low pitch of her voice and its peculiar throaty quality.

"Isn't it odd," she went on, "that we two Americans should find ourselves out here in Constantinople in such an extraordinary position?"

"It certainly is," Ruggles answered fervently. "I haven't quite got it through my head yet. It makes me sort of dizzy to think about it."

"Then don't try to think about it just yet," said Miss Elliot. "I think, though, that it might be well for you to know something about the way things stand."

Ruggles agreed.

"Well, then, let me tell you all about it. I've had a long talk with the lawyers. You see, Mr. Ruggles, we're both in the same boat, more or less. Only you're the captain. Hamid Pasha's idea was that the girls of whom you are now the guardian should be given the opportunities of modern social con-

ditions, just as if they were American or English or French."

"Then as I take it," said Ruggles, "our job is to take 'em to some civilized country and get 'em respectably married off."

"Precisely."

"What do *they* think about that scheme?"

"They're crazy about it. But let me tell you, Mr. Ruggles, that the girls are merely lovable, mischievous children. When I explained to them the plans for their futures, they began jumping up and down and clapping their hands, just as if I'd promised them some sort of a treat. I explained to them that they must be very careful not to make you angry or displeased, as it was now for you to say what they were to have and where they were to go, and that if you disapproved, it might go very hard with them. They're frightened almost to death at the mere mention of your name."

Ruggles gasped.

"You see," Miss Elliot continued, "you are their bogey man. I haven't made any actual threats, but I've given them to understand that they'd better be good if they want to be happy. I'm sure we shan't have any trouble with them."

"But what are we going to do with 'em?"

"The first thing we've got to do with them," said Miss Elliot, with decision, "is to get them the proper European clothes. I've had fitters and cutters coming over here from Pera for the last week, and you may have heard the sewing machine buzzing away all day long. The girls love their new clothes, and I'm sure they'll try to act up to them. I've been hard at work giving them lessons in deportment."

"But after they get their clothes and all that, what are we going to do with 'em?"

"Why, after that," said Miss Elliot,

"all we've got to do is to find them suitable husbands. I don't think there'll be much trouble about that. They're the prettiest things you ever saw, and far more accomplished than the average American society girl. They all speak three or four languages, and they are all musical, and can all dance beautifully, and are bright and merry and full of fun and mischief. Besides, they have a dot of two hundred thousand dollars each."

"It seems to me that our best plan would be to take the girls to Paris, where you might rent a good-sized place with a garden and grounds just outside the city. Then you must find some well-connected woman who might be willing to take a paid position as the girls'—well, social godmother, as one might say; somebody who could see that they met the better class of people and made nice acquaintances. They shall be introduced as Hamid Pasha's adopted daughters, which they really are. You yourself are Hamid Pasha's adopted son. I am merely their governess and companion. You catch the idea?"

"Yes," said Ruggles, with no very violent accent of conviction. "Say," he added, "are these girls Turkish, or what?"

He looked at Miss Elliot with a sudden curiosity. Until meeting her, he had rather dreaded to let his mind rest on his new and embarrassing responsibility, but this reluctance had been dispelled within the last few minutes, to be replaced by an intense interest and a not unpleasant excitement.

"One is Turkish. Her name is Bulbul—nightingale, you know. Then there's Roxana, who comes from Tiflis, in the Caucasus. She's a beauty—tall, with tawny eyes and a great mane of red-gold hair. She and Bulbul are both twenty. The next is Alessandra, a Rumelian, who is nineteen. And then there's Rosa, who has Italian blood, but

was born on the island of Cyprus. She's only seventeen. She was to have married the son of an old friend of Hamid Pasha's, but he was killed at Lule Bourgas. Rosa's a mischievous little thing, pretty as she can be. She reminds you of a Persian kitten. They're all four very dear girls, though I never feel quite sure about Roxana. She doesn't say all that she thinks, like the other three. You must understand, Mr. Ruggles, that none of these girls"—the color flamed in Miss Elliot's face, to be as quickly reflected in that of Ruggles—"that is, that they are—are——"

"I understand," Ruggles mumbled.

"What I am trying to tell you," said Miss Elliot, "is that these girls have never suffered any of the degradations of harem life. They have been carefully brought up and are not vicious-minded, like the inmates of some of the harems where I have given lessons. All four were destined to become the wives of high officials or very rich men, I imagine, as they are very beautiful and nothing has been spared on their educations. But I want to warn you of one thing—such girls are very quickly spoiled by too much good nature or familiarity on the part of those in authority over them. They look upon you as their master—their owner, you might almost say. They know that if they are good and obedient, you intend to make good matches for them and give them each a handsome dowry, but that if they are naughty, you have the right to send them off to shift for themselves as best they may. A Turkish woman thinks as much of her dot as a Frenchwoman, and you may be sure they'll behave themselves as long as they don't get it into their heads that you are easy and good-natured and that they can do as they like."

Ruggles' gradual inflation during this discourse might be compared to that of a pneumatic tire under the repeated strokes of a small air pump. Guardian,

trustee, master, owner of four lovely girls who thought of him with fear and awe—it was an outrageous, but an exhilarating idea. He was conscious of a growing sense of authority, of a dignity of mastery and firm proprietorship. Many men, he thought to himself, might look upon the whole matter as a stupendous joke and acquit themselves of such an office with an unworthy flippancy.

"Now, in regard to our plans," continued Miss Elliot. "Don't you think it might be a good idea for you to go to Paris, as soon as you can arrange your affairs, and look up a house? Some big place with a garden and surrounded by a wall. Then you will need to buy a motor car—a big limousine. You can take Mustapha and the cook, Emilio. As soon as you get things settled, I can follow with the girls and Sarah, their old servant, and a maid and Selim, the dragoman. In that way we shall be sure of having trusty and devoted servants and ones who will not gossip."

"Good," said Ruggles. "I think I know of an old gentleman in Paris who wouldn't mind giving me advice—a Mr. Falconer. He's a retired English clergyman and the salt of the earth. Pembroke knows him well."

"The very person," said Miss Elliot. "No doubt he may be able to put you in touch with some Englishwoman of good family and connections who would be willing to act as the girls' social godmother—for a salary, of course."

Ruggles thought suddenly of Miss Challand.

"I know the very person, right now," said he, "if she would be willing to do it."

CHAPTER XIV.

A polite and polished Greek lawyer, with a name that suggested the undulations when one shakes the end of a rope, called upon Ruggles and offered

him proof positive of much that had seemed like the dream of a hashish habitué. This lawyer's card announcing him as the attorney at Constantinople for a banking house whose name was respected the world over, Ruggles affixed his modest signature to a number of very interesting documents, which Pembroke, who had brought the lawyer over in his launch, assured him was the correct thing for him to do.

Ruggles was possessed of a clear, businesslike head for figures, and his acumen in seizing the details presented to him surprised both Pembroke and the Greek lawyer. The latter had brought a list of Hamid Pasha's holdings, which were widely scattered and included sound securities in Russia, the Far East, Europe, the United Kingdom, and America. Among the American investments was a considerable block of the preferred stock of the Walkeasy Shoe Company. Ruggles' eyes lightened as he looked at this item, and affairs began to seem more real to him.

"I know all about that stuff," said Ruggles, to the benignant Mr. Karapopulopulous—or sounds to that effect. "The company's all right, but darn' poorly managed."

He looked at Pembroke and grinned. Pembroke roared, and Mr. K., et cetera, pushed back his shell-rimmed spectacles and looked at them inquiringly from under his white, bushy brows. He had always understood that this security was a very sound one.

Left alone, Ruggles strolled out on the terrace to breathe the free air fanning down the straits from the Black Sea. It was quite a different Ruggles from him who had sat there some weeks before reading the "Songs Before Sunrise" to the dying Hamid Pasha. This interview with the lawyer had given him self-confidence, concrete proof as it was that he and no other was master of the household.

In the course of his promenade, he came presently to the head of the linden-shaded avenue that led to the haremlik. He paused and drew his breath deeply. The shaded bower tempted and fascinated him. At the far end he caught a glimpse of the latticed, rose-covered kiosk, and as he stood there staring in its direction, there came faintly to his ears, carried as if telephonically the length of the tunneled, mossy corridor, a rippling, gurgling laugh.

Ruggles' heart pounded at his ribs. There, two hundred paces distant, were his youthful wards, happily amusing themselves in their pretty bower. And here was he, their guardian and master, dreary and alone. Why not make their acquaintance now as well as later? Why moon about the grounds bored and solitary when there were four pretty girls of whom he was the appointed protector down there at the end of the avenue? Certainly no formal introduction was necessary to one in his position.

Ruggles' general idea of a Turkish harem was that of most people of the Western world, based chiefly on the "Arabian Nights" and other descriptions in more modern tales, which must afford the latter-day Turks considerable amusement. The stock properties were of fulsome beauties, in silken panties drawn in above morocco slippers with curled-up toes, flopping about on divans, blowing perfumed smoke from nargiles, and observing indolently the ablutions of sister captives splashing in marble fountains and attended by seminude slave women of African origin; monkeys, parrots, Persian pussycats, a good many bare arms and legs and things, and, guarding the door, huge blackamoors of the ox variety, wearing drawn scimitars and forbidding scowls.

But the room into which Ruggles

was ushered was precisely such as one might find in the summer residence of some rich and traveled Briton of simple, but aesthetic taste. The ceiling was higher, perhaps, and richly ornate in cofferwork, while the highly polished floor, of the same valuable Palestine oak, or "Abraham's oak," now scarcely to be had, was strewn with such rugs as are to be seen only in museums and the houses of the pretentiously rich; in both of which public institutions they are apt to be bogus. But the atmosphere of the room was purely modern.

There was nobody present when Ruggles entered, but from some distant part of the house came the low chatter of several voices, all apparently talking at once. He looked about him with surprise and pleasure at the pretty, home-like atmosphere of the place. Here, certainly, was no suggestion of voluptuous sensuality; no heavy, scented air, no slaves, no scimitars, nothing but a wholesome brightness and cheer.

From behind the portières at the far end of the room came a rustle; then the curtains were slid smartly back with a clicking of gilded rings, and Miss Elliot entered, at the head of a charming group of girls. Ruggles rose to his feet and stood supporting himself with his cane. He was scarcely able to believe his eyes. Harem ladies? These lovely sylphs gowned in the latest Parisian models! They were just such charming creatures as he had frequently seen stepping from sparkling limousines to enter the Ritz at the tea hour. They were wonderful. His head swam as he looked at them.

Such was Ruggles' first impression. That of the girls was of a sort to be compared to such emotions as might have filled the pulsating bosoms of the maidens of Thrace at sight of Alexander the Great. Here was the youth who had fought like a lion over the body of their beloved protector, and who had succeeded him in honor and

estate. Here was the fair demigod who was curator of their fortunes—and who bought them nice new dresses. He was young and brave and handsome and very rich. All four fell violently in love with him upon the spot.

"Mr. Ruggles," said Miss Elliot, "let me present Miss Bulbul."

Miss Bulbul, a plump and pretty Turkish maiden, with hair so black that it was almost blue, plucked her chiffon skirt daintily between her thumbs and fingers and made a curtsy. Ruggles bowed. Miss Bulbul straightened herself, took a deep breath, and nudged her way back behind Miss Alessandra, on whose dainty slippered foot she inadvertently stepped, thus evoking a stifled "Aie!" from Miss Alessandra.

"Miss Roxana," said Miss Elliot.

Miss Roxana, a wonderful ruddy blonde who topped Miss Elliot by half a head, stepped forward to make her curtsy. For an instant her great amber-colored eyes looked straight and fearlessly into those of Ruggles, who thought that he had never seen so magnificent a creature. There was no humility in this girl's gaze, and no antagonism. It was as straight and unconsciously questioning as that of a fearless child. Then the long lashes swept down, and with a movement as graceful as deep water running over a dam, she made her curtsy, straightened herself like a poplar after a gust of wind, and stepped aside, still intently studying Ruggles.

"Miss Alessandra."

The slim Rumelian girl made her curtsy quickly, panting a little as she did so, then stepped back with a stifled giggle that was the result of nerves. Ruggles was smiling as he made his bows. It was like a happy dream of princesses and things.

"Miss Rosa."

The little maiden from the island of Cyprus took a deep breath, grabbed her skirt on either side as if clinging to a

life line, stepped forward, and paused. Ruggles, watching her curiously, saw her dark eyelashes flutter like the wings of a butterfly impaled on a pin. Her pupils dilated and she swayed. Ruggles stepped forward quickly. He saw that the little girl was almost overpowered by emotion.

"Let's just shake hands, as we do in America," said he, and caught her as she was about to fall.

In spite of his bad ankle, he managed to support her to the divan, where he placed her among the cushions. Miss Elliot clapped her hands, at which a maid came quickly and was sent in search of salts.

"The poor child has been on her feet getting fitted all day long," Miss Elliot explained.

Ruggles seated himself on the edge of the divan and patted Rosa's hand. She looked up at him and smiled. The color crept back into her cheeks.

"You are ver-ry nice," said she.

Ruggles regarded her benevolently. She was as pretty as it is possible for a girl of seventeen to be, with a clear olive skin and the eyes of a gazelle. It is doubtful if even that kindly-natured poet and warrior, Hamid Pasha, had ever been infused with more paternal sentiment than was Ruggles at that moment.

"Say, Rosa," said he, "let me tell you something—don't you ever be afraid of me. Think about me just as if I were your big brother."

"Yes," Rosa answered, and her small hand tightened on his. "I see, Ruggles Effendi."

Misses Bulbul, Alessandra, and Roxana were still standing and there was a peculiar warmth in the eyes of the gorgeous Georgian beauty as they followed every movement of Ruggles. Miss Elliot looked at them all critically, then at Ruggles.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Ruggles,"

said she, and pushed a chair to where he was standing.

Ruggles thanked her with his quick, flashing smile, and his blue eyes traveled from her to the three expectant girls, who were watching him with a devouring intentness. As they met those of Roxana, the long lashes of the lovely Georgian quivered. A marvelous rosy wave of color flooded her exquisite complexion. It was the first time since childhood that any man but the venerable Hamid Pasha had looked upon her unveiled face, and her emotion was almost that of a maiden surprised at her sylvan bath by some Prince Charming, hunting in the forest.

From time immemorial, Trans-Caucasia has supplied the harems of Turkey, Persia, and Egypt with lovely girls, just as Rumelia has supplied rose attar, and the Crimea silk. It has been a commerce degrading, from the Occidental point of view, but not cruel. A lovely daughter born to a poor Caucasian family was a gift of the gods in more senses than one, and that region is famous for its lovely girls, as why should it not be, considering that it was the cradle of human physical perfection?

Once a daughter of some rugged mountaineer of the provinces of Kutais or Kars or Tiflis was discovered to be endowed with beauty and intelligence, her fortune was assured—and usually that of her family. Her plainer sisters cut the wood and hauled the water and tended the goats, while Miss Beauty took her ease, and laved her skin with fresh cream, and slept, and grew daily more beautiful, until, as a little girl of ten or twelve, she was purchased by some traveling merchant of this trade. And the price paid would sometimes raise a whole family from poverty to affluence. The family was as glad as if the daughter had made a brilliant match, as very frequently she did. The girl was glad, because it meant social

success, from the near-Oriental point of view.

Perhaps she might be sold at once as odalisque, or little housemaid, in some rich household, possibly that of the padisha himself, where she would perform light services and play in the sunny gardens and be taught music and dancing and intellectual accomplishments. Perhaps the merchant, seeing greater possibilities of profit, might have her educated at his own expense up to the time of her maturity. She was not degraded physically. One does not smirch a priceless pearl or drive in a coster cart a filly that may one day win the Grand Prix. No, her lot was destined to be an easy one, for the Turks, as husbands, are proverbial for their kindness and indulgence to their womenkind.

Such a girl was that lovely maiden, Roxana, daughter of a herder of Tiflis. She had been since her tenth year of the household of Abdul-Hamid, who was related to Hamid Pasha and who had given him the little girl not long before his deposition. Hamid Pasha had planted her in his garden as one might plant a lovely flower and watched her bloom with the same poetic appreciation.

But what of Roxana? Where did she as an individual enter into the general scheme of things? What of her soul and her highly active intelligence?

Up to this time neither had suffered. Lessons of various sorts had occupied her mind healthfully and sufficiently; she had been taught music, dancing, and two languages beside her own—French and English, which she spoke charmingly. Then, if truth is to be told, she was rather lazy and luxurious physically, though mentally active enough. She was also devout and prayed in the mosque frequently. But one thing lacked her, and that was love. The girl was as ripe for love as a sun-kissed pomegranate for the plucking.

Consequently, as she looked at Ruggles, late salesman of the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America, and saw the light of admiration in his clear blue eyes, strange tremors seized Roxana. As she understood the situation, she was his. She had been left him by Hamid Pasha, together with other real and personal property. He might take her with the others to Paris or any other place, but after her first glance, Roxana much preferred that he should take her for himself. She thought him very beautiful and a hero. Perhaps she was not so far wrong. Then, she had just seen that he was kind—too kind for her jealous taste. For the moment, she hated Rosa.

Ruggles, quite unconscious of the sudden passion that he had aroused in the hot heart of this mountain goddess, sank down into the chair offered by Miss Elliot and looked about him with a smile.

"Sit down, ladies," said he. "You mustn't mind me. I'm still pretty shaky." He glanced over at the divan. "Feeling better, Rosa?" he asked.

The girl slipped from her cushions with the lithe grace of a kitten and crossed the room.

"Yes," she answered, "I am all better—and I will get you a something on which to rest your foot, for you are lamed."

She pushed an ottoman to Ruggles' chair and, kneeling, raised his ankle, which was still bandaged, and shoved the cushion beneath it. Then she looked up at the young man with a smile.

"That is more comforting?" she asked.

"Yes, that's more comforting," Ruggles answered, smiling back at her.

At a nod from Miss Elliot, Alessandra and Bulbul seated themselves, primly arranging their skirts. Roxana, however, remained standing, her tawny eyes glowing at Rosa. She was wondering why she had been so stupid as

not to think of the stool. All of her short life she had been trained to please some lord and master, and here was this child from Cyprus forethinking her! She should get a good slap or a pinch for that, at bedtime.

"Sit down, Roxana," said Miss Elliot.

Roxana turned slowly and looked at the governess from under her long fringe of lashes.

"I like better to stand," said she in a silken voice that held a trace of sul- lenness.

"As you wish, my dear," said Miss Elliot evenly. She looked at Ruggles. "Don't you think that the girls' gowns are pretty?" she asked.

"They look as if they'd just stepped off the Rue de la Paix," Ruggles answered.

Roxana passed slowly in front of him, walking with the lithe, clinging step of a lioness, the foot about to leave the ground drawn deliberately by the extended hip. Her straight shoulders were carried back, her proud bosom thrust forward, and as she passed in front of Ruggles, she looked at him aslant from beneath her long, curved lashes. No trained cloak model in any of the big dressmakers could have shown a gown more deliberately or with better effect. But in Roxana's act there was something almost savagely primitive. She wished notice and admiration for her new gown and herself, and therefore went calmly to work to get it. She was quite successful, and her eyes glowed as she observed the effect she had produced upon the new master. Miss Elliot's brows contracted slightly.

"Show Mr. Ruggles your gowns, also, my dears," said she to Alessandra and Bulbul.

These two damsels, nothing loath, sprang to their feet and passed in review, though not with the majestic grace of their companion, Bulbul

stified a little giggle and turned away her pretty, soft-featured face. Rosa, who had quite recovered from her wave of emotion, sprang from the divan.

"I shall show mine, too," she cried eagerly, and began to march up and down, so trying to imitate Roxana that the others, even to the fair Caucasian, burst into peals of laughter. Rosa did not seem to mind.

"Is it not pretty, Ruggles Effendi?"

"It certainly is," Ruggles answered heartily.

"Must we veil our faces in Paris?" Roxana asked.

"Not unless you attract too much attention," said Miss Elliot.

"That's it," said Ruggles. "If people stare, you must pretend you do not see them."

Roxana looked rather pensive. Miss Elliot ordered tea, and the awe inspired by Ruggles being by this time entirely overcome, all were soon chatting most naturally. The young man found it difficult to believe that he was being entertained in a Turkish harem. At the end of half an hour, he rose to take his leave, shaking hands with each in turn. Roxana's little finger tips felt cold as they rested for a moment in his palm. This ceremony was a novel experience to her and awakened odd emotions.

CHAPTER XV.

Attended by the faithful Mustapha and Emilio, the late Hamid Pasha's Italian chef, Ruggles landed at Marseilles and took the train for Paris. There his first move was to call at the banking house that had for many years governed the affairs of the late Hamid Pasha, and establish his identity; no difficult task, the necessary papers and signatures having been already forwarded. Ruggles was amazed to discover how very easy everything is for a millionaire.

He then wrote to Mr. Falconer asking

for permission to call upon him, and received from the old gentleman a kindly note making an appointment. In it Mr. Falconer said that he had received a letter from Pembroke telling him of the manner in which Ruggles had distinguished himself and of his change of fortune. He congratulated Ruggles most warmly, and expressed himself as impatient to hear more of the details from his own lips.

In the urgency of his immediate affairs, Ruggles made no attempt to see Darthea or Miss Challand, but a great surprise from another quarter was in store for him. He had come into the hotel rather tired from an afternoon's shopping, and was leaning on his stick waiting for the lift, when a quiet, low-pitched voice at his elbow said:

"How do you do, Mr. Ruggles?"

Ruth! The blood rushed into Ruggles' face as he took the small gloved hand she gravely offered him.

"How do you do, Miss Downing?" he answered, in some confusion. "I didn't know that you were in Paris."

"My aunt and I have just got here from London," she answered. "We are only over for a few days to do some shopping. And how have you been since we last met?"

"Oh—pretty well, thank you," Ruggles replied, a little vaguely. "I'm just back from Turkey."

"From Turkey!" she echoed, slightly raising her eyebrows.

"Yes," Ruggles answered. "I went out there the day after—after I saw you here, with a doctor in the Red Cross—Lord Pembroke."

"Really?" Her eyes examined him with a sudden intense interest. "Did you serve with the Red Cross?"

"Yes," Ruggles answered; "that is, until I got wounded. I got shot in the ankle on the Tschatalscha lines."

Ruth glanced down instinctively, and as she saw the manner in which Rug-

gles was supporting himself, her face softened.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" she said, and raised her eyes to his face. "I must hear all about it. Can't you come up for a few minutes? My aunt is resting, and we can have a little chat before tea time. Or have you come to call on somebody?"

"Oh, no," Ruggles answered. "I'm stopping here."

Ruth did not show the surprise that this announcement gave her. She reflected quickly that some considerable change must have occurred in Ruggles' affairs to enable him to afford the Carlton. Then it occurred to her that he might possibly be in the service of some Ottoman official, as on her arrival at the hotel she had noticed a Turkish manservant in a fez sitting beside the chauffeur of a waiting motor car.

They went up together in the lift and into the little private salon in the suite that was reserved for members of the Downing family who found themselves in Paris.

"Well," said Ruth, "tell me all about yourself. What have you been doing? And who is Lord Pembroke? How did you get to know him?"

"Well, you see," said Ruggles, "after I left you that day, I went home and found a letter from the general European manager saying that the company had decided to give the managership of the Vienna store to another man—a fellow named Lorenz, who had been in the shoe business in Vienna and knew the trade. Maybe he was a better man for the job than I was, but I felt pretty well cut up about it, because the company had as good as promised it to me."

"I don't blame you," said Ruth, who, by certain subtle methods of her own, had sifted the affair quite to the bottom and knew almost as much about it as Ruggles himself. But she wanted to hear his version and, dropping her chin in her hand, she fixed her thought-

ful sapphire eyes on his face and encouraged him to talk.

"Coming just as it did——" said Ruggles, and hesitated. "Well, I made up my mind to quit the company then and there, but before I left, I wanted to tell Durand, the manager of the Paris store, just what I thought of him—and I wanted to tell Lorenz, too. Both of them had pretended to be friends of mine, and all the while they'd been working against me behind my back to do me out of the job. So I went into the store and——"

"Who began the row?" Ruth asked, never taking her eyes from Ruggles' face.

"Lorenz did. Then suddenly I saw red, and when Durand—— Oh, I don't know. I guess I just ran amuck. I don't seem to remember just what did happen. But there was a man in the store that I'd met the day before on the Avenue du Bois, and he got me out of the place and took me to the Madrid for lunch. Well, it turned out that he was Lord Pembroke, an English surgeon on his way out to Turkey to work with the Red Cross. I managed to persuade him to take me on as his orderly—and I've been out there ever since."

"Are you his orderly still?" Ruth asked.

Ruggles smiled.

"No," said he. "I might be, though, if it hadn't been for one of those things that can only happen in war. Pembroke had rigged up a field hospital, scarcely more than a dressing station, out on the Tschataldscha lines, and we were hard at work there one night when the colonel in command, a fine old Turk named Hamid Pasha, sent word that he was starting out to make his rounds and thought Pembroke might like to go with him. But Pembroke was mighty busy, so he sent me along to see if there were many wounded that hadn't been brought in. Well, we were inspecting one of the outposts when a bunch of

Bulgarians rushed it. Most of our horses were killed at the first volley, and the colonel's fell on top of him. I happened to see it and got to him and dragged him out from under it. We had some pretty tough hand-to-hand fighting for a few minutes, and then a bunch of our infantry made a bayonet charge and drove the Bulgarians back. I didn't know anything about that part of it, as I'd got a crack across the head with the butt of a rifle. The colonel was shot through the body, and I'd got my ankle smashed by a bullet and a bayonet stuck through my arm and one or two other wounds, and was all in."

"I should think that you might have been!" said Ruth. Her tone was dry, but her eyes were glowing and her breath coming quickly. "And what then?"

"Well," said Ruggles, "Pembroke managed to pull the colonel through for the time being, but he was a pretty old man and it was plain that his wound wasn't going to heal, and he said he'd rather die in his own house. He'd got it into his head that if it hadn't been for me, he might have been butchered by the Bulgarians; so nothing would do but he must take me with him. He was one of the richest men in Turkey, and lived in what had once been one of the royal palaces on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus. We were there about three months, and then Hamid Pasha died. I was all broken up, because he'd been just like a father to me." The tears came to Ruggles' eyes. "And what do you suppose he did? He made me one of his heirs and left me the palace and everything in, it and half a million pounds in money and securities."

Ruth sprang forward in her chair, her face aglow.

"Half a million pounds!" she cried. "Why, that's—that's about two and a half million dollars!"

Ruggles nodded.

"Yes," said he. "It's an awful lot of money for an ordinary chap like me, isn't it?"

Ruth stared at him for an instant.

"Oh—I'm so glad—so glad!" said she. "I congratulate you with all my heart!"

She gave him her hand. Ruggles clasped it in his firm grip, and they sat for a moment looking into each other's eyes. Then Ruth, her face very pale, released her hand gently and settled herself back in her chair.

"Thank you, Miss Downing," said Ruggles. "I thought you'd be glad."

"It's the most wonderful story I ever heard!" said Ruth a little breathlessly, for that warm handclasp had stirred within her some new and very powerful emotion that startled and rather bewildered her. No doubt the simple, modest narrative preceding it had a good deal to do with this. For Ruth had a vivid imagination, and as Ruggles had talked, she had been supplying in her mind the color that was lacking in the tale as he told it. That subtle wireless which exists between two people who are in sympathy had been highly active, and it is probable that Ruth's mental picture of the incident was not far wrong.

"You haven't heard the most wonderful part of it yet," said Ruggles, with a faint smile. "I guess the best way for you to understand that is to read the letter Hamid Pasha left me."

He drew from his pocket a long wallet of morocco leather and, taking therefrom the letter of his benefactor, handed it to the girl. Ruth opened it and read, while Ruggles leaned back in his chair and watched with tender amusement and admiration the changing color in her lovely face. Ruth's eyes opened wider and wider as she continued her perusal, and when she had finished, she let the letter fall upon her knee and for a full ten seconds—which is a long time under certain circum-

stances—stared at Ruggles, dumb and amazed.

"Richard Ruggles!" she gasped then. "Well, did I ever hear the like!"

"You can imagine how it jolted me," said Ruggles, smiling. "But after I'd talked to Miss Elliot—"

"Who is Miss Elliot?" Ruth demanded. "Tell me all about it. Tell me everything."

So Ruggles, in his brief, yet comprehensive way, described his visit to the haremluk and the girls and Miss Elliot and their plans for the future, while Ruth, her eyes scarcely leaving his face, followed his words in a silence as fascinated as that of Desdemona listening to the "strange tales" of Othello the Moor. She did not interrupt until Ruggles told her that he was going to see Mr. Falconer to ask for the aid and advice of that kindly and worldly-wise old gentleman.

"The very person!" Ruth exclaimed, and was about to say more when there came a discreet rap at the door.

Ruth sprang up to open it, and there stood Mustapha, who saluted in the Turkish fashion.

"What is it, Mustapha?" asked Ruggles, who was sitting with his face to the door.

"A note from Mr. Falconer, effendi, just brought by his servant and asking for a reply."

Excusing himself to Ruth, Ruggles opened the note, glanced it through, then laughed.

"That's funny," said he, "just as we happened to be speaking about him. He wants to know if I can go to luncheon at his apartment to-morrow and he says: 'I am asking Miss Challand and her niece and the Misses Downing, aunt and niece, the latter of whom have promised to honor me.'"

Ruth laughed.

"I was just going to tell you that we were luncheoning with Mr. Falconer to-

morrow," said she. "You can go, can't you?"

"Yes," Ruggles answered slowly. "I'd liked to have called on Miss Challand first, though, just to show that there is no hard feeling."

"Miss Challand?" asked Ruth questioningly.

"Yes. Don't you remember?"

"Oh, of course!" said Ruth. "She and her niece are those catty English-women who tried to snub you when they found out that you were a clerk in the store. And now that you've made good——"

"Look here, Miss Downing," Ruggles interrupted, "I don't consider for a second that I've made good. Making good, as I see it, comes of plugging along at your job, doing the best you can to learn the business and to fit yourself for the next grade, until you get to the top. That was my idea when I was with the company. But men that make a lot of money in some sort of a gamble—stocks or striking oil or gold, or a lucky deal of any sort—can't say that they've made good. They've just been fortunate; that's all."

"Then you really don't think that you deserve your own good fortune?" Ruth asked.

"Not yet," Ruggles answered. "I've still got to make good just as much as ever. I've got to carry out Hamid Pasha's ideas about those girls; and if I manage to do that, I've still got to do something else to earn the right to enjoy what I've got. Just because you happen to come out on top in a fight doesn't mean anything. I guess I came out on top in that fight in the store, but nobody left me a fortune for it. And not long afterward I manage to pull through a fight on the Tschataldscha lines and inherit two and a half million dollars for it. Where does the making good come in, I'd like to know?"

Ruth appeared to ponder this problem for a moment, then said:

"I suppose that when you learned that Lorenz had got the place you were counting on, it never occurred to you that perhaps the company had something better for you than the manager-ship of the Vienna store?"

"No," said Ruggles. "Of course it hadn't."

"It had, though," Ruth retorted.

"Who told you so?"

"Mr. Hastings. I saw him in London. He knew all about you and your record with the company, and told me that he intended to give you charge of the new big store in Rome."

Ruggles sat up straight in his chair.

"Then why couldn't he have said so?" he demanded.

Ruth shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"I don't know," she answered.

"Maybe he wanted to test your loyalty to the company."

"Well, it strikes me as a poor sort of way to test a man," said he. "Any fellow that would keep on plugging away after a jolt like that might as well make up his mind to stick to the same job for the rest of his life. He wouldn't deserve to get on."

Ruth nodded.

"I'm inclined to agree with you," said she. "When you found that the company had gone back on you, I suppose you lost your faith in the whole business—the Downing family and all."

"No," said Ruggles slowly. "I never for a moment felt any different about you and your father and Dick. If Dick had been here, I would have gone to him and asked for a square deal. But I didn't want to bother your father, and I certainly wasn't going to cry-baby to you, especially when you'd been so good to me and given me your picture."

"What's become of the picture?" Ruth asked, looking at him through narrowed lashes.

Ruggles smiled.

"Did you notice just now how Mustapha looked away the second he saw your face?" he asked.

"Yes. Why did he do that?"

"Because he recognized you from the picture. He thinks that you're like my patron saint, and—well"—the color poured into Ruggles' face—"I guess maybe he's about right. He'd think it was sort of sacrilegious to look at you. I've felt that way, sometimes, about the picture. One night in the emergency hospital, when I was saying my prayers before I turned in, a Turkish orderly came to give me a message from Pembroke. He didn't disturb me, because the Turks have got a lot of respect for anybody's religion, even if it isn't their own, but he went back and told Pembroke that he'd get me a few minutes later when I'd finished praying to the beautiful lady."

Ruth raised her hand to her bosom. Young as she was, a good many men had tried to make love to her, but to undergo an apotheosis was a distinctly new experience.

"That picture of yours has helped me a lot, Miss Downing," Ruggles went on. "It's sort of given me something to live up to and try to be worthy of. When I was laid up in Hamid Pasha's house, I kept it in the drawer of the table at the head of my bed, and when I was feeling pretty bad, I used to take it out and look at it, and it used to brace me up and keep me from losing my nerve—especially after Pembroke had got through dressing my ankle. I used to think that I'd rather die and have it over with than have any more bone gouged out."

"Oh—don't!" cried Ruth, looking at him with brimming eyes. She wondered if Ruggles had any realization that he was telling her of such a love as no other man had ever found words to express to her.

"I beg your pardon," said Ruggles.

"I didn't mean to upset you—but I just wanted you to know what you and your picture had done for me."

CHAPTER XVI.

In his cordial note of invitation, Mr. Falconer had suggested that Ruggles come to his apartment an hour early, in order that they might have an opportunity to talk before the arrival of the other guests. Ruggles was glad to comply with this suggestion, and was warmly greeted by the kindly old gentleman.

"My dear young friend," said he, beaming at Ruggles over the tops of his shell-rimmed pince-nez, "I'm delighted to see you. Pembroke gave me most of your news, but I am most anxious to hear the tale from your own lips. Do sit down."

They settled themselves comfortably, and Ruggles proceeded with his narrative, describing his experiences with an unconscious ability. Then he told of the four girls whose guardian he now was.

"The trouble is," he said, "to get them started right."

"I do not think there should be much difficulty in that respect," Mr. Falconer replied. "With such credentials as you have at your disposal, it should be an easy matter to see the young ladies properly introduced. Of course, my dear fellow, you may count entirely upon my own poor efforts." He raised his hand. "Don't thank me. It is an insignificant service, which I am only too happy to render. What I was about to say is that our difficulties"—Ruggles noted the plural possessive and his heart went out to Mr. Falconer—"are more apt to lie in limiting the circle than in enlarging it. With such uncommon beauty as you describe and a dot of a million francs apiece, they are apt to be a lure for all sorts of fortune hunters."

"Miss Elliot and I ought to be able to manage that," said Ruggles cheerfully. "Besides, they've got to get my consent to marry if they want their dots."

Mr. Falconer nodded.

"Quite so," said he. "Now in regard to this question of a chaperon. Have you had anybody in mind?"

Ruggles flushed.

"I thought of Miss Challand, sir," he answered, "if you think she'd care to do it."

Mr. Falconer struck his hands together.

"The very person," said he. "But then how about her niece?" and he looked at Ruggles so keenly that the boy blushed, for he read the double question.

"Oh, that needn't interfere," said Ruggles, with a faint flush. "Miss Westbrooke could live with us, too. It would be a good thing for the girls to have such a nice companion. You see, Miss Elliot is a lady and all that, but, after all, she's a paid governess."

"I'm afraid, though," said Mr. Falconer, "that Miss Westbrooke might object to becoming your constant guest—especially after the rather shabby way in which she treated you. She has since told me that she regretted her behavior in that respect."

Ruggles' face brightened.

"I'm mighty glad to hear that," said he.

Ruth and her aunt, Miss Downing, arrived at Mr. Falconer's handsome apartment in advance of Miss Challand and her niece. Ruth had no intention of missing the beginning of the second act of the most interesting drama that had ever fallen within her youthful experience, and one in which, it must be admitted, her heart shared equally with her head. She wanted to see the meeting between Ruggles and the girl who had treated him so—in Ruth's opinion—snobbishly and ungratefully.

In spite of the protests of her aunt, the two ladies arrived ten minutes before the hour set for *déjeuner*, and Ruggles suffered sweet agonies of rapture as Ruth gave him her hand and he looked into her violet eyes. The excitement of the situation had brought a delicate flush to Ruth's cheeks and a vivacity to her manner such as Ruggles had not previously observed. She seemed in some subtle manner nearer to him, less of the goddess and more of the mortal maid. He could not keep his eyes from her.

Promptly upon the hour, Miss Challand and Darthea were ushered in by the stately butler, and, having been greeted by their host and introduced to the Misses Downing, they turned to Ruggles, who was waiting quietly. Miss Challand, feeling not quite at her ease, was slightly stiff. Darthea's rosy color deepened and her eyes were filled with an intense curiosity. It seemed to her that she had never seen so great a change in a person in so few months. The happy, light-hearted, careless boy had suddenly become a man—and a very attractive man, at that.

The luncheon passed pleasantly, and a little after three Miss Challand and Darthea arose to take their departure. A shower threatened, and Ruggles offered to take them to their destination in his car, which was waiting below. After a slight demur, Miss Challand accepted his offer.

"Miss Challand," said Ruggles, when they were whirring along, "there's something I'd like to talk to you about whenever you can spare the time. It's in connection with finding some lady to act as what Pembroke calls 'resident chaperon' for these girls that I've got on my hands."

"I should be very glad to advise you, I am sure, Mr. Ruggles," said Miss Challand, to whom Mr. Falconer had already described Ruggles' interesting charges.

"We'll be pretty quiet at first," Ruggles went on, "because, while it isn't the custom in Turkey to go into mourning the way we do, still I don't think that it would be quite the thing for the girls to go out much so soon after the death of their adopted father, do you?"

"Indeed I do not," replied Miss Challand.

"Aren't they going to wear mourning?" Darthea asked.

"Not the way the French do," said Ruggles. "But their dresses are quiet—black and white and sort of simple. Miss Elliot looked after that." Seeing that they were approaching their destination, he came to a sudden resolution. "See here, Miss Challand," said he, "I hoped that maybe you might be willing to help me out in this business. I mean, that I thought perhaps you might consider taking charge—and if Miss Westbrooke would come, too, so much the better. Mr. Falconer has been telling me about an old place in Neuilly that seems to be just what I want, and there's a big studio in a wing of the house that would be just the thing for Dar—Miss Westbrooke. I won't say any more about it now, but please think it over. Mr. Falconer's coming to see you, and he'll tell you all about it. Well, here we are."

And Mustapha, with his umbrella, ushered two very much agitated ladies to their door.

CHAPTER XVII.

The old De Nitry place in Neuilly proved to be precisely what Ruggles wanted. The high walls about the grounds inclosed a little park with some fine old trees, a flower garden, a tennis court, stables, and a garage. The house was spacious and modern within, and there was a pavilion, of which the upper story was a roomy studio.

Ruggles was delighted with the place and lost no time in securing it. Being

personally recommended to the family by Mr. Falconer, an honored friend of years' standing, he was enabled to rent the house practically furnished.

In the meantime, Mr. Falconer called upon Miss Challand. At first she would not hear of Ruggles' proposition. Darthea's sense of the bizarre inclined her to favor the idea, but Miss Challand rather resented Mr. Falconer's suggesting such a thing. When, however, the old gentleman assured her that many women of his acquaintance quite as well connected as she were constantly filling such positions—which were, as a matter of fact open only to people of birth and breeding—Miss Challand began to grow pensive.

For one thing, the lease of their apartment was to expire in the autumn, and they had been informed that the rent was to be raised a third. Miss Challand had not been able to see just how they were going to be able to afford to remain in Paris, and Darthea was very loath to return to England.

And then the astute old gentleman laid down his best card. Darthea was of course expected to remain with her aunt, and Ruggles would feel more than compensated for her entertainment in having before the eyes of his wards such an admirable exponent of what a well-bred young lady should be. If Miss Challand and Darthea would consent to become members of the household, Ruggles would place at their exclusive disposal the pavilion, with its studio, and the apartment connected with it. He described the studio, with its spaciousness and splendid light, and the quiet beauty of the gardens.

So in the end, after many long and intricate arguments, the two ladies gave their official acceptance of Ruggles' offer and were in due time installed in the comfortable pavilion of the De Nitry place.

In due course of time Miss Elliot, with her four interesting charges, ar-

rived in Paris, to be met at the station by Mustapha with the car, Ruggles preferring to welcome the party at the house. The five ladies were placed in the limousine and dispatched immediately with Mustapha, the other servants following.

Four rather dazed and bewildered damsels offered their slim hands to the smiling Ruggles, though the eyes of one of them were not so mazed that they failed to light with a sudden glow as they looked for a swift instant into those of the master. As they rustled up the marble stairway to their apartments, whispering one to the other, Miss Elliot turned to Ruggles.

"It's stunning—perfectly stunning!" said she, glancing about her at the marble-columned antechamber and the stately chambers that opened off from either side. "Oh, but I must tell you! One-fourth of our task is already done."

"What do you mean?" Ruggles demanded.

"Roxana—who do you think wants to marry her? Pembroke."

"P-P-P-Pembroke——"

"No less. He got to coming over pretty often after you left, and as he was so nice, and had been a sort of an executor, as you might say, I got in the habit of asking him for tea at the kiosk. To tell the truth"—she drew down the corners of her mouth—"I rather got the idea that he was interested in *me*."

"In *you*!" Ruggles' tone was not the height of flattery.

"Well, you needn't be so terribly complimentary. He's been awfully nice to me, and I began to get ideas. But no such luck. He came to look at Roxana—and you really can't blame him much. He talked to her a good deal, but that wasn't surprising, as she is far the most intelligent of the lot. Then one day she sang some weird little melancholy songs to the accompani-

ment of the harp, and—— Oh, what was the use? He's crazy about her. The day before we left, he told me that he was coming on to marry her. He takes your consent for granted."

Ruggles reached for his handkerchief.

"Surely you have nothing to object to in him?" she asked, noting his expression.

Ruggles rose from his chair and stood for a moment leaning on his stick.

"No," he answered slowly. "Nobody could find anything much the matter with Pembroke. But say, Miss Elliot, suppose you had a friend who had done more for you than any person alive—and suppose one day he went crazy with the heat and took it into his head that he was a lion tamer and wanted to get into a cage with a lioness. Would you let him, if you were husky enough to hold him back? Of course you wouldn't. And when he got his senses back, he'd be mighty glad that you hadn't. Well, I'm not so sure that I *am* husky enough—but I'll certainly do my darnedest to hold Pembroke!"

With some inward mortification, which, however, she managed to conceal, Miss Elliot told Roxana that Ruggles Effendi had seen fit to veto her prospective alliance. Much to her surprise, the girl took this information with the quiet submission of the Oriental woman, trained from infancy to obedience. In fact, her coolness was a bit of a shock to Miss Elliot. Roxana merely raised her splendid shoulders slightly, smiled a little to herself, and said:

"I am glad."

Miss Challand and Darthea took up their abode in Ruggles' household a few days after the arrival of Miss Elliot and the young ladies, and to Ruggles' immense relief, appeared to be charmed with the girls, Miss Elliot, and the establishment in general; which lat-

ter, thanks to the high efficiency of the trained Levantine servants, was soon moving with the noiseless rhythm of a finely adjusted machine.

Mr. Falconer called with the Turkish ambassador, whose chief Hamid Pasha had once been. Then came invitations to informal teas at the house of the Turkish ambassador and at Mr. Falconer's apartment, where acquaintanceships were formed with certain ladies of the diplomatic set. Other invitations followed, these functions being of a quiet and formally informal character, for although, following the Mohammedan custom, conventional mourning was not being observed, it was necessary to conform to a certain extent to surrounding conditions.

Miss Challand then issued some invitations for tea—and there were no regrets. On one of these occasions, Roxana was asked to sing—which was to her the equivalent of being ordered to sing—to the accompaniment of her harp. This triumph of the Trans-Caucasus drifted from her chair like a wreath of seaweed caught in an eddy, and stood for a moment smiling and swaying, while her eyes peered beneath their long lashes until they caught those of Richard Ruggles, late salesman of the Walkeasy Shoe Company, who happened to be sitting next the wife of the Argentine ambassador.

"Do you wish me to sing, Ruggles Effendi?" she asked.

"Certainly," answered Ruggles. "Sing one of those Persian songs."

So Roxana sang.

CHAPTER XVIII.

One day Ruggles received a letter from Pembroke, saying that he had seen Mr. Karapopolupulous, who was having the greatest difficulty in preventing the confiscation, by the imperial Ottoman treasury, of the late Hamid Pasha's palace and the many valuable

things that it contained; and that if Ruggles wished to make a fight for it, he would advise his coming out to Constantinople to defend the litigation. Ruggles, his business instincts rebelling against the idea of letting property that was his by moral and testamentary right be taken from him without a protest, decided, to act upon this advice, the more so as his presence in Paris seemed no longer absolutely necessary. Therefore, he turned over the business management of his household to a trustworthy *homme d'affaires* recommended by his Paris lawyers and proceeded at once to Constantinople.

Pembroke met him upon his arrival and took him to his quarters, where they had a long talk, Ruggles describing how he had established his wards and the social attentions that they were already receiving.

Pembroke sat for a moment puffing at his pipe, then looked at Ruggles with a swarthy flush under his weather-beaten skin.

"I suppose Miss Elliot told you that I want to marry Roxana," he said, a little stiffly.

"Yes," Ruggles answered, "she told me about that."

"Hope you've no objection to offer," said Pembroke.

Ruggles did not immediately answer. Pembroke glanced at him and his lids narrowed. The color deepened in his clean-cut face.

"'Pon my word, you don't look any too pleased about it, old chap, I must say!" He took his pipe from his mouth and stared at Ruggles curiously. Then, noting the gathering flush on Ruggles' lean cheeks, his handsome face clouded. "Good Lord, you haven't gone and fallen in love with her yourself, have you?"

"Me? No, of course not."

"Then has anybody else?" Pembroke leaned forward, gripping the arms of his chair, and the veins on

his temples darkened. "Some other Johnny tryin' to cut me out?"

Ruggles shook his head.

"No," he answered heavily.

"Then what the devil is it? What are you lookin' so glum about? Mind you, though, I'm not precisely askin' your permission, my dear fellow. I'd marry her anyhow—and let the dot slide."

Ruggles leaned back in his chair and looked thoughtfully at Pembroke's hot face.

"Say, Lord Pembroke," said he, "did you ever have any pig keepers in your family?"

Pembroke's strong jaw fell.

"Why—upon my soul—are you mad, Ruggles?"

"No. I'm just asking for information."

"Pig keepers—what the deuce do you mean? Swineherds?"

"Yes. Swineherds. You haven't, have you?"

"Look here, Ruggles"—Pembroke's jaw hardened and his eyes began to gleam ominously—"I don't mind a little chaff now and again, but if you think that just because you've come into a pile of money—"

"Hold on a minute." Ruggles raised his hand. "Just try to keep your temper and you'll see in a minute what I'm trying to get at. There's another question I want to ask you. I've heard you speak of your mother, and I know you think a heap of her. How would you like it if people were to point at her and say: 'See that woman? Well, her father tended hogs out in the beech woods—and so did her brothers and sisters. She might have been doing that now, herself, but she was mighty good looking, and her folks thought that they might get more out of her some other way, so they sold her—'"

He got no farther. Pembroke had bounded from his chair, his face crimson, and his powerful grip fell on Rug-

gles' throat. But even as his grasp tightened, he began vaguely to understand. The tense fingers relaxed. He thrust Ruggles from him and sank back into his seat. The color faded from his cheeks.

"You damned little cad!" he growled. "You little shoe-shop bouncer that I picked out of the gutter!"

"That's right," Ruggles answered, with a little choke. "That's what I was. And you're Lord Pembroke. And if you do what you say you want to do and marry Roxana, then people can say about your children's mother what you were ready to choke me for just sort of asking how you'd feel if they were to say it about yours. Only in the case of your children, it would be true. The grandfather of the next Lord Pembroke would be a dirty swineherd somewhere over there across the Black Sea." And he jerked his head toward the east.

Pembroke's face was set and rigid. He swallowed once or twice, but did not try to speak. Ruggles went on as quietly as if he had not just narrowly escaped a strangling:

"You know as well as I do, Lord Pembroke, that people in your position can't always do what they like. It wouldn't be a square deal—not only to those of their family that are living, but to those that might come after them. I never looked at it that way until I met you and Mr. Falconer and Hamid Pasha and some others that were the real thing. But there's no getting around it. And then there's another thing—this girl Roxana's only about half civilized. I've watched her and I know. For all of her wonderful looks, she's a regular she-devil inside, and it only needs a jolt to bring it out. What sort of a wife would she be for you? Believe me, I'd rather marry a lioness and live in the cage with her. There's something in her eyes that scares me, sometimes—and you know

yourself that I don't scare so awful easy."

Pembroke, who had been watching him fixedly, leaned forward and buried his face in his hands.

"God!" he muttered. "You've struck it, Ruggles. It's just that has driven me nearly mad. She's a great, splendid tawny lioness. But damn it, man, she's more than that! She's got mind. She's got a soul. I know her better than you think. I've talked to her. I've studied her. There's lots of the savage underneath, I'll admit, but who wants one of these pulin' 'born-in-captivity' women? I can tame her. I'm none so civilized myself, and I've always told myself that if ever I came to mate, it would be with some such woman as that." He drew out his handkerchief and wiped his glistening forehead. "There have been no end of sultans whose mothers were taken from the same class," he growled. "Hamid Pasha himself was very probably the son of a slave. All the Turks take their wives in that way."

"Yes," Ruggles answered quietly, "and look at them now."

Pembroke's jaw set stubbornly, and when he spoke, there was something in his voice that struck a chill through Ruggles.

"Oh, well," said he harshly. "No doubt you're right. I'll chuck my title, change my name, marry the girl, and clear out for America or Africa or some other place. Nuff said. I've got to have her, and that's jolly well all there is about it."

Nobody, to hear and see the man, could have doubted the finality of this decision. Ruggles' face turned very pale, and his expression was for the moment almost fierce.

"You'd really do that?" he asked.

"Right," said Pembroke, almost indifferently. "More than that, I'm goin' to do it. I tell you, Ruggles, I've got

to have her, and that's all there is about it."

Ruggles leaned forward quickly in his chair.

"Then take her," said he. "You can have her. I'll give her to you. There's nothing to hinder. Take her and do anything you like with her—only for the love of God *don't marry her!*"

Pembroke started forward, staring at Ruggles in amazement and disbelief.

"What?" he cried. "Are you mad? When Hamid Pasha——"

"Don't talk Hamid Pasha to me!" cried Ruggles roughly. "Didn't I save his life and get all shot up doing it? Did I promise anything about these girls? I guess the score's about square between Hamid Pasha and Richard Ruggles." He leaned farther forward and deep lines drew themselves obliquely across either cheek. "But the score isn't settled between you and me, Pembroke. What you said was true. You picked me out of the gutter, and brought me out here with you and made a man of me. When I was shot to pieces, you stuck by me day and night—and gave me your own clean water when I was thirsty, and risked cholera drinking out of a stinking ditch. And afterward—— Do you think I'm going to see you throw your life away after all that? Not by a damned sight! I'd give you the whole bunch, first. I—I——"

His voice broke. He burst into tears, turned in his chair, folded his arms against its back, and buried his face in them. Sobs shook his body as if to rack it apart.

Then a strong, comforting hand dropped upon his heaving shoulder with all of the old gentleness and magnetic touch. A low, vibrant voice, tremulous itself, said soothingly:

"There—there—my boy—there—there! I'm sorry——"

Pembroke returned to England when

Ruggles had been about three weeks at the Porte, and the latter was rather relieved to have him go, as the surgeon had grown moody and taciturn and inclined to avoid all social intercourse. His attitude toward Ruggles was similar to that of a would-be suicide who harbors resentment against the friend who has thwarted him. It was understood between the two that Pembroke was not to see Roxana again.

At the end of six weeks, thoroughly disgusted with Ottoman "law" and its methods, Ruggles consigned the whole business to his lawyer and returned to Paris.

His household greeted him warmly, and from Miss Challand he received the gratifying news that a matrimonial alliance had been proposed by a certain Madame de Montereau on the part of her two sons, Marcel and Bertrand, aged respectively twenty-seven and twenty-four, whom she desired to wed to Bulbul and Alessandra. These young gentlemen, though not titled, were of a good family of prosperous manufacturers. On the death of their father, they might expect to inherit the business and a considerable fortune.

Also, the hand of Roxana had been sought in marriage by the young Baron von Hertzfeld, son of the retired banker of that name. The Von Hertzfelds were orthodox Jews, enormously rich and highly respected. Yakub, Roxana's suitor, was thirty years of age and a man of great charm and intelligence. He had been presented by an attaché of the British embassy.

"Of course," said Miss Challand, "she would have to embrace his religion. Do you think Hamid Pasha would have objected?"

"No," Ruggles answered. "All that Hamid Pasha objected to was an all-round infidel. What does Roxana think about it?"

"Nothing has been said to Roxana," Miss Challand answered. "She is a

very odd girl, Mr. Ruggles. If it weren't for the clever things she sometimes says, one might almost think her dull. The others are tremendously interested in their new lives, and as merry as schoolgirls on a lark. But Roxana goes sometimes the whole day without speaking a word. Yet she seems happy, and is always extremely agreeable. She must see that Baron von Hertzfeld admires her tremendously, and she is always very nice to him, but then she is nice to everybody."

"Maybe I'd better sound her a little on the subject of Von Hertzfeld," said Ruggles. "I'll try to get a chance to speak to her alone, to-night after dinner. Of course, if she doesn't want him, she doesn't have to have him."

The household dined together, Ruggles presiding at one end of the table and Miss Challand at the other, between them such a galaxy of beauty as one might travel far and fail to find. The conversation was general and vivacious, Alessandra and Bulbul being the chatterboxes of the party, and Ruggles derived much entertainment from their childlike comments on people and things. When he himself spoke, the girls became quiet.

As they left the dining room, Roxana lingered.

"I am going out in the garden," she said to Miss Elliot. "I wish to take the air."

"Very well, my dear," Miss Elliot answered, and glanced at Ruggles. "Would you like to play bridge after we have our coffee, Mr. Ruggles?" she asked.

"I don't play," Ruggles answered. "I'll have to get you to teach me some day. I think I'll go out and walk around a little with Roxana, if she doesn't mind."

Roxana's long lashes swept up suddenly, then down again.

"I shall be mos' happy," she murmured.

Miss Elliot turned away, and Ruggles led Roxana through the conservatory and out into the perfumed darkness. His stick slipped on the marble step, and instantly Roxana's hand closed on his arm with an amazing strength.

"Be careful, Ruggles Effendi," said her sweet voice in his ear.

And Ruggles, while wondering at her strength, for she had saved him from a nasty fall, was at the same time conscious of a faint, exquisite odor, spicy and elusive, which seemed to come from her hair.

They followed a little path and came presently to a wicker bench under a flowering catalpa, of which the snowy blossoms shone whitely against the dark, lustrous foliage.

"Let's sit down here," said Ruggles. "I want to talk to you, Roxana."

"I am listening, Ruggles Effendi."

She seated herself beside him, and Ruggles felt her breath on his cheek as she swayed toward him to look into his face, as if trying to read its expression in the gloom. Again he was conscious of the sweet, faint perfume. He leaned forward, resting his clasped hands upon the head of his cane.

"Do you like it here in Paris, Roxana?" he asked.

"Yes—now that you have come."

"Oh, what difference does that make?" Ruggles asked, a little awkwardly. "You like it, anyway, don't you?"

"I would not like it without you," she answered, "because I love you. Can't you feel me loving you, beloved?" Her voice was like the first sweet, low, tentative note of a nightingale before its song; a prelude and a promise of the liquid notes to follow.

Ruggles could scarcely believe that he had heard aright; he was bewildered and confused. What did the girl mean? Then it flashed through his head that this childlike declaration was not to be taken in its literal sense, but merely as

an expression of sympathy and liking. It would be outrageous to suppose that Roxana had fallen in love with him, or that, even if she thought she had, she would state the fact with such simple candor. For Roxana's Oriental viewpoint of their relative positions was impossible to Ruggles. He decided that the best method of procedure would be to come to a clear mutual understanding. Roxana had just said that she loved him. Ruggles took his point of departure from this reckoning. But before expressing himself, he decided that he had better put Roxana right on certain figures of speech, which might afterward lead to misunderstandings.

"I'm mighty glad you think so much of me, Roxana," he said. "But you know there are a good many different kinds of love."

Roxana's eyes glowed darkly from her pale face.

"I have them all for you, Ruggles Effendi," she said softly. "Why do you not love me, too? How happy we could be!" She sighed.

Ruggles felt the blood pouring into his face.

"I guess you don't realize what you're saying, Roxana," he said.

"But indeed I do," she answered quickly. "Why should I not love you? And why should you not love me? Do you know any girl more beautiful than I? Do I not please you? I can sing for you and play for you and dance for you. And where could you find a girl with such hair as mine and such a skin and a body that is neither fat nor thin, and——"

"Roxana," Ruggles interrupted, "you mustn't say things like that."

"Why not, effendi?" she whispered softly. "Are they not true? And am I not yours? Did not Hamid Pasha give me to you? What may I not say to you, Ruggles Effendi? For your

eyes, there is no veil across my face or across my heart."

Ruggles leaned back in his chair, breathing rapidly. There was a sweetness and a seduction in Roxana's voice such as he had never heard in any other, while the childish simplicity of her wooing cleared it of all immodesty. She spoke from no heat of passion, but plaintively, like a child hurt at having withheld from it something that it feels to be its due. The ravishing Roxana was begging for love as a little girl might beg for promised sweets.

"What is it, Ruggles Effendi?" she went on. "Have I done anything to displease you?"

"Of course not," Ruggles answered. "But, you see, it's like this, Roxana. Before Hamid Pasha died——"

He was interrupted by a light step on the gravel path, and a white-clad figure appeared. Then a voice that both recognized as Miss Elliot's called:

"Mr. Ruggles!"

"Here I am," Ruggles answered.

Miss Elliot drew nearer and stood for a moment looking at them as they sat close together on the wicker bench. It was too dark to see her face, but when she spoke, her voice held a peculiar cold note.

"Baron von Hertzfeld has called," said she. "I thought you might like to meet him."

"All right," Ruggles answered. "We'll be in directly."

Miss Elliot turned and went back to the house. Ruggles looked at Roxana.

"What I was going to say is this: Hamid Pasha left me a letter, when he died, asking me to look after you four girls and see that you got started right in life and married in the European way. He felt that Turkey was breaking up, I think, and he didn't want you left without somebody to take care of you. He said in his letter that I was to be like a big brother to you, and that's exactly how I feel. If I were

an outsider, it might be different, but, you see, Roxana, I'd be a pretty poor sort of a man to go contrary to his directions, after all he's done for me."

Roxana nodded her lovely head.

"I see, Ruggles Effendi," she answered sadly.

"So you mustn't think about me that way," Ruggles went on. "I want to see you girls happily married to good husbands. Now, Bulbul and Alessandra will probably marry these two Montereau brothers. This Baron von Hertzfeld wants to marry you. What do you think about it, Roxana?"

The girl began to toy with the gravel with the tip of her little slipper.

"He is very nice," she answered in a low voice, "and very handsome. He is a Jew, but I have heard that the Jews are very kind to their wives and give them a great many presents. Besides, he is very rich. I will marry him, if you wish me to, Ruggles Effendi."

"That's fine," Ruggles answered, greatly relieved. It flashed across his mind that perhaps he had been unjust to Roxana. Why, this girl whom he had regarded as a lioness was after all as docile as a kitten. "But before you marry him, you'd better find out if you really care for him," said he.

Roxana slightly raised her splendid shoulders.

"It does not matter," she answered. "If I am to marry like a European woman, I will do as they do. If I do not like him afterward, I will take a lover."

Ruggles gasped. The kitten seemed to be showing a little claw at the end of its velvet paw.

"You mustn't say things like that," he protested. "Nice women don't ever think of that sort of thing."

Roxana smiled, and her white teeth flashed through the murk.

"If you loved me, I should never deceive you, effendi," she answered

softly, and her lithe body swayed toward him. "You would never have to watch me. Aie—my dear——"

Her bare arms slipped up about his neck, and she rested her head for an instant on his chest. The odor of her hair was in his nostrils. Then she loosed him suddenly and rose with a little shudder.

"I will do as you tell me, Ruggles Effendi," said she.

CHAPTER XIX.

Ruggles met the brothers De Montereau and liked them, which sentiment was cordially reciprocated. "*Un homme charmant et très distingué*," was the verdict of the Frenchmen. Madame de Montereau, with the family solicitor, had an interview with Ruggles, when the marriage settlements were drawn up and a formal betrothal announced. The double wedding was set for the first week in May.

The suit of the young Baron von Hertzfeld was also approved by Ruggles. Not only did he like and admire Von Hertzfeld, and believe that he would make Roxana a kind and dutiful husband, but he was anxious to see the girl safely married and established. There was something in the expression of her tawny eyes, when for a second they flashed into his, that made Ruggles nervous and ill at ease. He felt that he was dealing with a primitive nature which he would never be able to understand and which contained high potentialities of mischief. He hoped that matrimony, with its attendant responsibilities, might tame the savage instincts that he was able to sense beneath his ward's quiet and self-contained exterior.

Roxana appeared to be quite content with the arrangement, and was much pleased with her engagement ring and its superb diamond. The wedding was arranged for September, when Von

Hertzfeld's family would be able to assist.

Meanwhile, the season advanced and, the heat of Paris growing oppressive, Ruggles rented a furnished villa at Le Touquet for the months of July and August, and removed his household thither. The brothers De Montereau ran down for every week-end, and on one of these outings they brought with them an intimate friend, a lieutenant in the army and a young man of good connections, though small personal fortune. His expectations were; however, of the best—as Ruggles, anticipating another suitor, took the pains to assure himself—so when the young man's aunt formally requested in his behalf the hand of Rosa Ben Ali Hamid, Ruggles decided to give his consent, no doubt influenced to some degree by Rosa's impassioned pleadings that she might have her adored Pierre.

One might think that Ruggles should have been a very happy man at so successful a fulfillment of his obligation to his late benefactor. But he was feeling very far from happy. Mr. Falconer, who had come down to spend several days at the Le Touquet villa, had informed him that there was a rumor of Ruth Downing's engagement to a young Englishman of title, the Honorable Cecil Townsend, and at this news, it seemed to Ruggles that all of the light had gone out of his life. He could no longer deceive himself in regard to his true state of heart toward Ruth. He knew that he loved her with an intensity which absorbed him soul and mind and body, and that without her all else was a hollow mockery, and would always be.

This sadness of Ruggles made him the more interesting to his household, none of whom—except perhaps the devoted Mustapha, who had witnessed certain orisons—ascribed to it the proper cause.

Then one day Ruggles came in to

luncheon with such a high flush on his lean cheeks and so vivid a brightness in his eyes that Miss Elliot, on catching sight of him, feared that the fever brewed in the swamps flanking Derkos must have germinated again. Ruggles seemed nervous and excited. He had been watching the tennis on the courts of the Hermitage Hotel and he had seen enter a big touring car containing Ruth and Miss Downing. He announced this fact in as casual a voice as he was able to control.

"Really?" said Miss Challand. "Did you speak to them?"

"No," said Ruggles. "I just saw them pass."

"They've probably run over to meet Mr. Downing and his son on the *Rotterdam*, which is due to arrive at Boulogne to-morrow," said Darthea. "I saw in the *Herald* about a week ago that they were among the passengers."

Ruggles was conscious of a sudden irritation with Darthea for not having informed him of this all-important fact. He had never formed the habit himself of following the steamer sailings and social items, but he could not understand how anybody could fail to be interested at any time by the movements of any of the Downing family, or fail to comment on them. As a matter of fact, Darthea had commented on the circumstance, but Ruggles had not been present at the time.

This, then, was undoubtedly the reason of Ruth's presence in Le Touquet, which is only a short run from Boulogne. Ruggles found himself suddenly deprived of appetite.

"I'm afraid you're not feeling well, Mr. Ruggles," said Miss Elliot, observing him decline a favorite dish.

"Oh, I'm all right, thanks," said Ruggles. "I guess I'll go over and call on Miss Downing and her aunt this afternoon and ask them to dinner. Miss Downing said, when I saw her last, that she wanted to meet the girls."

Roxana raised her tawny eyes slowly to Ruggles' face.

"Is she very pretty?" she asked.

"Yes," Ruggles answered, "and she's just as sweet and nice as she is pretty. You'll all be crazy about her."

"Are you crazy about her?" asked Roxana.

"My dear!" said Miss Challand, in mild reproof.

Ruggles smiled wearily.

"I guess everybody that knows her is crazy about her, Roxana," said he, and fell into an abstracted silence.

Roxana was rather silent, too, but, when unobserved, her eyes shot yellow gleams at Ruggles from under their long, dark lashes. She had seen deeper into his soul than her less instinctive, though more sophisticated, mentors.

CHAPTER XX.

Ruth welcomed Ruggles as warmly as if they had been friends of years' standing, which, indeed, on Ruggles' side, they had been.

"I'm so glad to see you," said she. "Do sit down and tell me all about yourself." She half closed her eyes and, with her head slightly aslant, gave him a brief, but solicitous examination. "Do you know, you're not looking quite as robust as I'd hoped to see you. I believe you're thinner—and you seem lots older than when I saw you last."

Ruggles laughed.

"Can you blame me?" he asked. "Four lively girls and three chaperons to watch is enough to take the fat off anybody, I guess."

"I should think it might be," Ruth agreed. "I'm crazy to meet them. Mr. Falconer has been in London for a few days, and he gave me a good deal of your news. So they're all engaged?"

"I should say they were!" Ruggles sighed. "I need a bell and blinders to go around my house, in spite of Miss Challand and Miss Elliot and Darthea."

Those girls take more watching than a Bulgarian advance column. Not that there's any harm in them," he added hastily, "but they're such a pack of kids—that is, all but Roxana."

"You know, you're a celebrity," said Ruth. "Have you seen the last *Tattler*? There's a full-page picture of you and your pretty wards about to take your dip, and it's labeled: 'Richard Plantagenet Ruggles, Meteoric Millionaire, and his Lovely Wards, the Misses Ben Ali Hamid.' They are pretty!"

"Oh, there's no trouble about their looks," said Ruggles wearily. "Sometimes I've almost wished they were as homely as a huckleberry pie. However, they'll all be married pretty soon, thank goodness!"

Ruth laughed merrily.

"I wonder you didn't fall in love with one of them yourself," said she.

Ruggles shook his head.

"Don't tell me anything like that," said he, "because I don't believe it."

Ruth gave him a swift, sidelong look. They were sitting by an open window looking out upon the grounds of the casino. They were quite alone, for the weather was fine and everybody was on the golf links or the tennis courts or the beach. Ruggles looked at Ruth, and his features tightened with something of the expression of a person who has a sore tooth and bites on it hard, with the idea of seeing how much pain he can stand.

"Speaking about engagements and falling in love and all that sort of thing," said he, "Mr. Falconer told me something about you."

"The nasty old gossip! Even if he is a dear!" cried Ruth. "I know what he told you. He said that I was engaged to Cecil Townsend! Well, I'm not—nor ever was nor ever will be! Just because we rode together a few times and he was—well—rather attentive, as all nice Englishmen are apt to

be to American girls—— It was all nonsense. I wouldn't marry the Honorable Cecil Townsend if he were—well—if for my sake he were to become a shoe clerk in one of our stores—say the Vienna branch." She smiled maliciously at the panting Ruggles. "If I ever marry, I'll marry some man who sees things the way I do, and who doesn't try to hide the fact that the family fortune came from 'tryde.' My father's in 'tryde,' and my brother's in 'tryde,' and I'm darn' proud of it! I'm a daughter of 'tryde' and I don't take any odds from anybody! Do you get me?"

"I sure do," said Ruggles reverently. It seemed to him that a nightingale was singing in his heart.

Ruth glanced at her little pendant watch.

"It's nearly four, and the tide is high at four. Let's go for a swim."

"That for me!" said Ruggles, with such a clarion enthusiasm that Ruth laughed.

"Well, then, I'll get auntie, and we'll go down to the beach," she said.

Miss Downing seemed glad to see Ruggles and readily accepted his invitation for dinner. Like her niece, she was devoured with curiosity to see the Misses Ben Ali Hamid. Ruggles telephoned to the villa to say that there would be two more guests for dinner—for Von Hertzfeld and the two De Montereaus were also expected—then went down to the beach with Ruth and her aunt.

As they swam seaward, Ruggles rolled on his side and, as his sinewy arm flashed clear of the water for its downward stroke, Ruth saw between shoulder and elbow a livid, triangular cicatrix.

"That's an ugly scar on your arm," said she.

Ruggles smiled.

"I got that from a sword bayonet in the fight I told you about," said he, "but

it never bothered me much. I guess I got off pretty lucky, with nothing worse than a smashed ankle."

"Is the man that gave you that jab in the arm still alive?" Ruth asked.

"No," Ruggles answered shortly. "Let's swim back. There's an offshore current out here."

They paddled slowly in and waded out on the beach. Thigh-deep, they turned as if impelled by a common impulse and looked at each other.

"It's funny," said Ruggles, "but after a good, long swim I always feel as if I didn't belong on the land. I sort of hate to go ashore again and crawl about with the crowd." He gave a short laugh. "Maybe it's because it's sort of hard work to keep up with the procession."

"I think," said Ruth, "it's more apt to be because the procession finds it hard to keep pace with you."

Miss Downing and Ruth were charmed with Ruggles' wards, and found it difficult to believe that such *comme il faut* young ladies could possibly have grown up "in a Turkish harem. Roxana, particularly, fascinated Ruth, who thought her the most beautiful creature she had ever seen, and told Ruggles so. But Ruggles did not enthuse. Once or twice during dinner he had caught a curious gleam in Roxana's golden eyes, as they rested on Ruth, which had given him a curious disquiet. There was something in that veiled look that reminded him of the look in the eyes of a cat as it watches a bird from the ambush of a shrub.

The evening passed pleasantly and when, late the following day, Ruggles went to the hotel to pay his respects to the Downings, he learned from Ruth that her father and brother had decided to go on to London for a few days' business trip. She and her aunt were to stop on at Le Touquet until their return, Miss Downing having found the

combination of sea and pine woods most beneficial to her asthma.

The days that immediately followed were the happiest Ruggles had ever known. He and Ruth were constantly together, on the beach or the golf links, bathing, or running over the road in a light racing car that Ruggles had purchased. It seemed to him that each passing day brought them closer in sympathy and understanding.

Darthea and Ruth became quite intimate, and one night, when Miss Downing was suffering from a headache, Darthea brought Ruth informally to dinner at the villa, which was situated at some little distance from the hotel in the midst of the pine woods, on a slight eminence which commanded a view of the sea. After dinner, Ruggles, to his great disgust, was obliged to make a short call at the house of a neighbor, an Englishman, to arrange some details of a golf tournament for which Ruggles had offered a cup. The business was soon transacted, and Ruggles returned to the villa, where he was met by Miss Challand, who wore a rather worried face.

"It's very odd, Mr. Ruggles," said she, "but I can't imagine what has become of Roxana and Miss Downing."

"What?" exclaimed Ruggles, with a curious presentiment of ill.

"They have disappeared," said Miss Challand nervously. "The other girls are all in the music room. Bulbul and Rosa were singing, and Roxana and Miss Downing were talking together in a corner of the room when they presently got up and went out. I asked them where they were going, and Miss Downing said that Roxana had consented to show her the Circassian gesture dance, but that she wouldn't do it before the others. I thought nothing of that, knowing that Roxana is subject to such whims. Well, they went out about half an hour ago and haven't come back. I've been all over the house

and through the gardens, but can't find a sign of them."

Ruggles was conscious of a most disagreeable hollow feeling at the pit of his stomach, and his mouth seemed suddenly to have gone dry. He had noticed that Roxana had looked odd during dinner and had wondered if she were ill.

"Have you said anything to anybody?" he asked.

"No," Miss Challand answered and, glancing at Ruggles' face, she went suddenly pale. "Why do you look that way? What do you think——"

"Oh, nothing," replied Ruggles, with an effort to make his tone natural. "It's just one of Roxana's freakish ideas. She probably took it into her head that she'd like to dance out in the moonlight. Don't say anything. I'll run out and take a look around. They may have just gone for a little walk in the pines."

He hurried through the rear of the house and out into the back garden, which was long and narrow, with a sanded walk that ran straight down the center to a small iron door in the wall. This opened upon a little winding path which traversed the pine woods for a quarter of a mile and then joined a broad thoroughfare.

Ruggles paused at the gate and, striking a match, stooped to examine the sand. It showed the fresh imprints of two pairs of small, high-heeled shoes. Also, the bolt of the gate, always fastened at night, had been slid back. The two girls had plainly passed this way, and Ruggles hurried along the path as fast as his lameness would permit. It was not dark, for the moon was nearly full, but its light was partly shrouded by a thin, high sea haze drifting in from the Channel. There was, however, no difficulty in following the path, despite the darkness of the pine woods, and Ruggles pushed on, rather expecting to come presently upon the two

girls. Then the stillness of the place was disturbed by a distant scream.

It was not a loud scream and it sounded choked off, as if the person emitting it might have discovered its cause to have been something to give no alarm. Neither was it repeated, and Ruggles, after pausing an instant to locate its direction, which seemed directly on his path, hurried on.

The pines grew thicker, shutting off the vague light, and as Ruggles groped his way onward, he grew more and more uneasy. He remembered his scene with Roxana in Paris, and her assurance that, although he might dispose of her hand as he thought best, she would never love any other man than himself. Also he recalled the fact that Roxana alone of his wards had not warmed to Ruth.

Presently Ruggles discovered that he could not be far from the main road, for he heard at no great distance the snorting of a high-powered motor, which appeared to have been that moment started, for there came a successive crash of gears as the driver went into the higher speeds. At the same moment he came out upon a little opening in the pines where the pale moonlight shone down upon the carpet of glistening pine needles. As he did so, his eye was caught by a white object upon its farther side and partly in the shadow of the overhanging boughs.

Ruggles hurried toward it, and as he drew near, saw to his horror that it was the body of a woman in evening dress. She was lying on her face, her loosened hair tumbled about her naked shoulders, from which the light tulle of her gown had been torn away, and as Ruggles, sick with dread, dropped to the ground at her side and turned over the limp and senseless body, his heart seemed to stop beating, for the pale moonlight was reflected from Ruth's pallid face.

With a choking gasp, he dropped his

head, laying his ear upon her heart. There was a faint pulsation, and as he took her head upon his knee, he was aghast to find that her light scarf was twisted tightly about her throat and knotted there. It was the work of an instant to loosen it and then, realizing that the girl was nearly strangled, Ruggles, who had assisted at one or two drowning accidents, lowered her head to the ground and, taking both her wrists, began to perform the rhythmic motions of artificial respiration.

But Ruth was suffering from shock, rather than from suffocation, though this latter might have come later. At the end of a minute or two, she gave a shuddering sigh, her lashes fluttered, and her dark eyes stared at Ruggles unseeing.

"What—what's the matter?" she asked vaguely.

"Don't try to talk, Ruth," said Ruggles huskily. "Take a few long breaths."

Ruth obeyed, inhaling the sweet, pine-scented night air in shuddering gasps. She struggled up, leaning against Ruggles, who drew the scarf about her bare throat and shoulders.

"Oh—oh—" she gasped.

Her head fell against Ruggles' chest and she began to sob. Ruggles held her close, soothing her as if she had been a little child. Presently her sobs ceased. She looked around her wildly.

"Never mind, dear," said Ruggles. "It's all right now. It's all right now."

"Where is she?" whispered Ruth. "Oh, why did she— Oh, I remember now. It was because of—of you—" She thrust herself away from Ruggles and, dropping her face into her hands, sat sobbing with silent violence while her abundant hair fell down to cover neck and bosom.

Ruggles slipped off his dinner coat and buttoned it about her. Presently Ruth managed to control herself and turned to look into his face.

"How—could—you?" said she, in a low, vibrating voice.

"How could I what?" Ruggles put his arm about her shoulders to draw her to him again, for she was swaying as she sat.

Ruth shrank away.

"Don't!" said she. "Don't touch me! I've got to think."

She was silent for several moments. Then Ruggles, whose mind was working rapidly, as it was wont to do in crises, said gently:

"Don't try to think now, dear. It's too awful. If you feel able, try to walk back to the house. It's not far, and I'm afraid Miss Challand may raise an alarm, and you mustn't be seen like this. We can slip in by the back door, and you can go right up and go to bed. I'll telephone to your aunt that you have been taken ill and we think you'd better spend the night."

Ruth struggled to her feet before Ruggles could offer his hand. She was a strong girl and courageous, and now that the first shock had passed, violent anger was beginning to take possession of her, which was perhaps the best thing that could have happened.

"Very well," said she, in a low voice. "I can walk. Don't touch me, please."

And they started back along the dim-lit path.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Well," said Miss Challand, "if the poor child gets through it without brain fever, it'll be a wonder. I must say, though, she seems more angry than shocked or frightened—and that's a jolly good thing. No sign of that savage girl?"

Ruggles shook his head.

"Did you telephone to Von Hertzfeld?"

"Yes. They told me at the hotel that he received a message at dinner and left in his car immediately, after saying that he had been called to London by

a sudden case of illness in his family and would cross on the midnight boat from Calais."

"Then there's nothing to do but wait for some news of Roxana," said Miss Challand. "We don't want a scandal, if only for the sake of the other girls, and she can't get far with no money and nothing to her back but an evening dress. No doubt she'll come slinking in presently like an escaped leopardess crawling back to the cage. She's mad."

Miss Challand then went on to tell Ruggles what she had learned from Ruth. It appeared that, while talking with Roxana after dinner, the wild Georgian girl had suggested that they slip out for a little stroll in the moonlight. When Ruth, not feeling this to be a polite thing to do, had demurred, Roxana had said that if she would go with her for a few minutes, she would show her the Circassian dance for which Ruth had often asked in vain and which Roxana said was much more effective in the moonlight. Ruth finally consenting, they had gone out. Whereupon, Roxana had insisted on leaving the grounds, not wishing, as she said, to be observed from the house, as the dance was not an entirely conventional one, in its true interpretation. Ruth, full of curiosity and the spirit of adventure, had finally been persuaded.

Roxana had then conducted her to the clearing in the woods, and there, turning suddenly, had addressed her with a fury and a passion that had appalled the American girl. She had accused Ruth of all sorts of unspeakable things that had to do with Ruggles, who, Roxana said, was her own lover. Ruth, startled and terrified, had been beginning to believe the girl insane when Roxana had snatched from her bosom a vial of what Ruth had rightly guessed to be vitriol and had attempted to dash it into Ruth's face.

But here the ex-slave girl had reckoned without her host. Ruth, though

of far less than Roxana's size and strength, was lacking neither in strength nor courage. Seeing her danger, she had sprung at Roxana and gripped her wrists. In the struggle that had followed, the flask had dropped into the bushes and been lost. Roxana had fought like a tigress, and Ruth with the strength of desperation. But the Georgian had proved more than a match for her antagonist, finally flinging her to the ground and twisting her scarf around her neck, then making off through the pines.

"It's just about as awful as anything could be," said Miss Challand finally. "I always had a feeling that Roxana was far from civilized, and so had Miss Elliot, though Darthea liked and admired her. What's to be done? We've got to hush the thing up. But we can't let Hertzfeld marry her. It wouldn't be right."

Ruggles glanced at his watch.

"I guess we won't be able to help ourselves—or Hertzfeld, either," said he.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, as I dope it out," said Ruggles, "Hertzfeld and Roxana are probably landing at Dover, just about now. Do you know, Miss Challand, I believe it was Roxana who sent that message to Von Hertzfeld. She probably told him that something had gone wrong with her here, and that she wouldn't stay in the place any longer, and that he could take her to England to-night and marry her by special license to-morrow, or not at all. And Hertzfeld, being head over heels in love, took her up on it."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Miss Challand.

"I heard a big car starting down on the road when I was hustling through the woods," said Ruggles, "and now that I think of it, it sounded like that sixty Mercedes of Von Hertzfeld. The same sort of cough and roar. Of

course, he probably thought that Roxana had been disciplined by some of us and wouldn't stand for it. Well, so much the worse for him. I don't see how we can help it now."

He got up and took one or two limping steps, then paused in front of the elderly Englishwoman and looked her squarely in the eyes.

"It's my own darn' fault for not having been more on my guard," said he. "I had Roxana sized up from the very start as a savage. Pembroke wanted to marry her, and I went out to Constantinople to prevent it. She made love to me in Paris, and I told her that there was nothing doing and that she'd got to put it all out of her head. She never made any fuss, and promised to marry anybody I wanted her to. It might have gone through all right if she hadn't seen that I was in love with Ruth Downing. But that was more than that tigress nature of hers could stand. So she made up her mind on the spur of the moment to ruin Ruth's beauty and elope with Von Hertzfeld. It struck me to-night at dinner that she was looking sort of wild. I ought to have kept my eye on her."

Miss Challand sank into a chair and sniffed her salts.

"Fancy such things in this day and age!" said she.

Ruggles' face hardened.

"Roxana doesn't belong to this day and age," said he. "Ruth has had a mighty close call. I don't believe Roxana meant to kill her when they started out, but she meant something just as bad, if not worse. When Ruth knocked the bottle out of her hand, she saw red and decided to strangle her. And now"—his face grew even whiter and more tense—"I suppose nothing will ever make Ruth believe that she didn't have more reason for doing it than just because she took a fancy to me and I laid down the law to her that she was my ward and nothing more."

Miss Challand shook her head. Then, at sight of Ruggles' drawn features, she rose from her chair and patted him gently on the shoulder.

"My dear boy," said she, "I'm afraid it's going to be rather hard—but we'll do the best we can. You may be sure that you shall have all of my help and sympathy."

Ruggles seized her hand in his.

"Thank you, Miss Challand," said he.

Ruggles' shrewd surmise in regard to Von Hertzfeld proved to be correct. The following day brought a letter written by him on the Calais-Dover boat. In it the young man offered infinite apologies for the step he had taken and his apparent abuse of Ruggles' confidence and many kindnesses. As excuse, he said that the possibility of losing Roxana had been something that he had not had the strength to contemplate and, knowing her varying moods and intense nature, he could do no more than follow her instructions. He trusted that Ruggles, who had already approved his suit, would understand and sympathize with him in his apparently ungrateful behavior.

But Ruggles' chief concern was not for the principals of this runaway match. Ruth had appeared the following morning, a little pale and quiet, but none the worse for her experience. Of the entire household, only Ruggles and Miss Challand were cognizant of the true facts. The others supposed that Ruth had been persuaded by Roxana to connive at her elopement, and that this had made a certain coolness between Ruggles and herself. For that a coolness existed was most apparent. Ruth returned to the hotel, and for several days Ruggles mooned about with set features and tightened lips. He had tried to see Ruth without avail. And in the meantime, Mr. Downing and Dick arrived, and a golf chum of Ruggles', who put up at the hotel, told

him that the family were leaving within a day or two for Scotland.

Ruggles made no further efforts to see Ruth or any of the Downings. He felt sick and sore. He reasoned that if Ruth, knowing him as well as she did, could believe that any act of his might have been responsible for Roxana's furious attempt at vengeance, there could not exist between them that sympathy which had seemed to be an established covenant. Everything was sham. All human emotions were empty shells. He sat on the beach and stared out across the drab waters of the Channel, and wished that he might conscientiously drown himself therein.

It was perhaps with this furtive suggestion—not that he had any idea of drowning himself, of course, but for the sake of the mere melancholy contemplation—that he went down to swim one afternoon when the weather was not such as to appeal to the casual bather. The air was humid and oppressive, yet carried a distinct chill. No breeze had stirred for hours, and the water was as motionless and flat as a skating rink. Never a ripple lapped the beach, and at some distance from the shore the near horizon fetched up in a sluggish blanket of fog. The tide was far out and still running ebb, and so dank and dismal were all bathing conditions, as compared with the cheer of golf and tennis and the grounds of the casino, that Ruggles found himself practically alone.

But not entirely alone, for a long way out a speck of crimson was melting into the gray haze that introduced the fog. It caught Ruggles' quick eye and sent a shock through him, for Ruth tied up her dark tresses in a crimson kerchief when going into the sea.

Ruggles waded and waded and waded until it seemed to him that he must have walked halfway to England. Then, the water deepening suddenly, he flung himself forward and started out to in-

vestigate the red kerchief. It occurred to him that whoever might be under it was certainly getting farther out than was prudent with the conditions of the tide. And then, as it continued seaward, he was filled with the sudden conviction that it must be Ruth. He did not believe that there was another woman in Europe who would be rash enough to swim straight out into that thickening mist and through those chill, threatening waters. Also, he was sure that she had seen him and wished to avoid him.

For an instant he was on the point of turning back, if only to keep from driving her into danger. He compromised by floating about without swimming farther seaward. Then the crimson kerchief disappeared utterly, swallowed up in the incoming fog, and, glancing shoreward, Ruggles discovered that the beach had likewise disappeared. That settled it; he turned on his side and swam straight out through the stagnant water with its wispy wreaths of fog.

Presently the gray, elusive opacity was all about him. He rolled over and tried to peer beneath it, and was successful, in so far that he saw the crimson kerchief not very far ahead. It appeared to be motionless, and Ruggles swam slowly in that direction. As he drew nearer, Ruggles saw that it was indeed Ruth, lying on her back and paddling slowly outward. He splashed a little to attract her attention. She looked up, turned in the water, and stared at him without a smile.

"Well, here we are again, Mr. Ruggles," said she.

"You're too far out," said Ruggles. "You'd better start back. Do you remember what I told you about the offshore current?"

"But I am swimming back," said Ruth. "I've been swimming back for the last ten minutes."

"I guess you must have got turned

around," said Ruggles. "Sometimes you do when you've been floating."

"You must be turned around yourself," Ruth retorted. "The beach is straight in there." Her arm flashed clear of the water and pointed in the general direction of Beachy Head.

"I don't think so," said Ruggles. "I should say it was just opposite."

Her eyes opened very wide, and she pushed back a wisp of hair that had escaped from beneath the crimson kerchief.

"Listen," said Ruggles. "Maybe we can hear something from the shore."

They paddled silently under the surface. For a moment or two there was not a sound, the dense fog seeming to have quenched noise as well as vision. Then, in the nervous stillness, there came from far in the distance—and, as it seemed to Ruggles, straight out in the Channel—the honk-honk of an automobile horn and the faint pulsation of a running motor. The girl turned a triumphant face toward Ruggles.

"A motor car," said she. "I knew I was right."

Once more the honk-honk reached their ears, distant and muffled in the mist. There could be no doubt as to its direction.

"Come on," said the girl, and turned on her side.

Together they swam ahead with long, even strokes, swimming straight out into the treacherous Channel, whither a passing motor boat had lured them. Ten minutes passed; fifteen minutes; and still no shore sounds reached their ears. The chill of the water began to strike through them. The girl's face, as she looked back at Ruggles, showed the growing fright that was stealing over her.

"We were far out," said she.

But Ruggles scarcely heard her. A peculiar aspect of the water about them had attracted his attention. Where formerly it had been as flat and un-

disturbed as the surface of a mill pond, there now appeared peculiar wrinkles and broad, bland swirls, as if some deep current were thrusting up from beneath. He felt his body turn, as if caught in an eddy. The girl discovered it also.

"What's that?" she cried, in sudden alarm.

"Tide," Ruggles answered. "The place is full of currents when you get a way offshore. I'm going to shout for help."

He filled his lungs and sent as much voice as he was capable of out into the fog; then listened. Not a sound came in answer. The silence of oblivion seemed to rest on the face of the water. He looked at the girl. The terror in her face went into him like a knife. There were dark shadows under her eyes and her lips were quivering.

"I'm afraid it's all up with us," said she faintly. "I can't go on much longer."

"Put your hand on my shoulder and rest," said Ruggles. "I'm game for a good while, yet."

She did as he told her, and Ruggles swam on slowly. The eddies turned and twisted them about, and soon all sense of direction was lost. The tide flowing out of the estuary of Etaples was carrying them swiftly out and to the westward. The strongest swimmer alive could not have gained the beach under those conditions. Ruggles began to tire.

"I'll swim again," said the girl presently. "I'm getting numb with cold. Have you any idea which way the shore is, now?"

"No," Ruggles answered. "But it wouldn't make much difference if I had. We're in the offshore current. Even the Channel swimmers can't buck against that."

"Then it's all up with us, I suppose," she said lifelessly.

"Not by a good deal," Ruggles an-

swered. "If we can keep afloat a while longer, we're pretty apt to get picked up by some of the fishing boats that go out of Etaples with the tide. I'll shout again."

He did so, but again without result. Then, glancing at his companion, he saw that she seemed to be settling in the water. He caught her with his left hand and drew her to his shoulder.

"Hang onto me," he gulped. "I'm not tired."

He no longer tried to make onward progress, merely paddling to keep them both afloat as long as possible. The eddies grew more violent, twirling them about like driftwood. The day was growing darker. And then, as Ruggles' ears were beginning to hum and black bands to pass before his eyes, he sighted an object on the water at one side. Putting out his waning strength, he struggled toward it and discovered it to be a large pine packing case, thrown overboard, perhaps, from some passing liner.

"Here's something to hang to," said he, and reached it in a few strokes.

The girl roused herself.

"What's the use?" said she drowsily. "If we've got to drown, let's drown and get it over with."

"We're not going to drown," said Ruggles stubbornly. "You hang onto this box. This place is full of fishing boats, only we can't see 'em on account of the fog. Are you cold?"

"Not now. I don't feel anything at all. Only sleepy."

"Well, then, keep awake. Be a sport. We'll get picked up. You just wait and see."

They clung to either side of the crate, which, while not sufficient to support their weight, was yet buoyant enough to keep their heads above water. From far in the distance, a fog whistle reached their ears and this first sound that had broken the deadly silence acted as a stimulant. The girl seemed to

rouse herself, and her eyes rested for a moment curiously on Ruggles' face.

"I wonder where we'll be in a few hours," she asked.

"Oh, we'll be all right," Ruggles answered comfortingly. "Say, you don't seem to be hanging on as you ought to. Let's lie across this thing, and I'll hold you on."

"All the strength seems to have gone out of my arms," she answered.

"Here, wait a minute."

Ruggles swarmed up across the bottom of the crate, thus submerging it, then drew the girl to his side. Passing his arm around her, he jammed his fingers into a slot between two planks; then so arranged their bodies that they floated at an angle of forty-five degrees, their heads and shoulders clear of the brine.

"Now you can't slip off if you should try," said he. "Put your arm around my neck and hook your fingers in between the planks."

Ruth did as he told her, and for some time they floated thus locked together. The cold had ceased to trouble them, for the skin surfaces had grown numb.

"I feel sleepy," said Ruth presently.

"So do I," said Ruggles, "but we mustn't give in to it. If we did, it would soon be all up with us."

"I think it is anyhow," said Ruth. "But somehow I don't seem to care much. If it weren't for father and Dick, I don't believe I'd care at all." She turned her head, which was almost against Ruggles'. In fact, her cold cheek touched his as she changed her position. "I'm sorry I was so nasty about Roxana," she said. "I knew all the time it wasn't your fault—but I couldn't help thinking that perhaps you—"

"Never mind that now," said Ruggles. "There was never any 'perhaps' about it. And don't wabble this thing any more than you can help, Ruth, or you might tip it over."

"I don't care much if it does tip over," said Ruth. "I'm so tired."

"Well, I do," said Ruggles. "Let me tell you something, Ruth. There's a lot more than we realize back of all this. We're not going to drown. My father killed himself working for your family, and your family never knew it. I guess the Ruggles were made by God Almighty to work for the Downings, and it's all just kismet, as the Turks say. Now here I am working to save your life, and I'm going to do it, too! I saw you out there farther than you ought to have been, and went out to look after you. We got mixed up, I guess. What you took for an automobile was a motor boat running down for Etaples. I thought about that too late.

"But never mind. There's a Ruggles on this job, and I've got a hunch that he's going to make good and get you out of trouble. I had the same hunch when I was astraddle of Hamid Pasha, smashing the heads off the Bulgarians. All you've got to do now is to keep your courage up and stick it out. I guess we've got sand enough to keep us going for quite a lot of hours yet, and we're bound to get picked up as soon as it gets light. And let me tell you something else." He laid his cheek against hers. "You've got a debt to pay to the Ruggles family. And I'm here to claim it. From now on you belong to me, living or dead—do you understand, dear?"

"Yes—I understand. How dark it's getting! Where does that light come from—or is it just the flashing in my eyes?"

"That's the Le Touquet Light," Ruggles answered. "It began to flash just before we found this crate. Only for that, I might never have seen it. Ruth"—he raised her head in his hands—"kiss me."

She raised her pallid lips to his, then let her head sink against his shoulder.

CHAPTER XXII.

The small steam yacht *Réveuse*, nosing her way through the fog at night-fall toward Boulogne, was hailed from the murk by distant cries for help.

The forward lookout heard them first on the starboard bow, and reported to the bridge. A moment later they came from close aboard on the starboard beam, and Monsieur Pelleu, the celebrated etcher, who was on the bridge with his sailing master, distinguished a dark object not far away. The yacht was promptly stopped and a boat lowered, Monsieur Pelleu himself taking the yoke lines. Thus facing forward, he soon discovered a man and a girl in bathing costume clinging to what appeared to be a capsized boat or piece of wreckage. As the gig drew near, Monsieur Pelleu observed the man clasp his companion in his arms and kiss her repeatedly.

"Ha! They will not perish," said Monsieur Pelleu to himself.

Ruth and Ruggles were lifted into the boat by the strong arms of the Breton sailors and taken aboard the yacht in so exhausted a condition that they had to be carried up the accommodation ladder. Yet, in spite of this fatigue, neither appeared to be in by any means a critical condition. On the contrary, there shone from the face of each a peculiar luminosity.

"Behold the power of love!" said Monsieur Pelleu to himself.

When Ruggles awoke the next morning, the light was streaming through a porthole. From overhead came the murmur of many voices.

He swung his feet over the edge of his bunk and sat for a moment trying to collect his thoughts. The air was close, and, seeing that the stateroom had a deck ventilator, he opened it. As he did so, there came down to him a murmur of conversation, in which he

recognized Ruth's voice and a resonant bass that he correctly supposed belonged to her father.

A sudden misgiving swept over him, and his heart sank. He forgot his millions, forgot his notoriety, forgot his newly acquired position and his many new-formed friends. Or, rather, the moral support of all these things seemed suddenly to desert him. There, just overhead, was this man whom he had always so revered, Richard P. Downing, whom but a little over a year before he, Ruggles, had been serving on his knees. Only the night before he had been actually in mind to ask this great man for the hand of his only daughter—and on what grounds? Merely because he had been swept with her out into the Channel and had encouraged her to cling to a floating box until rescued.

This, at least, was how the situation now appealed to him. He wondered if good fortune had turned his head. Was there one chance in a thousand that Mr. Downing would so much as listen to his demand? What did it matter to him that Ruggles was a millionaire; that through a freak of fortune he had incurred the gratitude of Hamid Pasha and been raised to an unmerited position? What did that show about him, and what right did it give him to aspire to Ruth?

And what of Ruth? What right had he to take advantage of a girl who was at the point of exhaustion and with death staring her in the face, to claim an obligation and demand so rich a reward? What if he had held her in his arms and prevailed upon her to receive his kisses and extracted a promise, the purport of which, in her fearful stress of mind and body, she probably had been unable to realize at the time?

Ruggles grew hot with shame at the recollection of his wild words and actions. It seemed to him that he had played the part of a coward rather than

of a hero, and that to attempt, to profit by it now would be the performance of a cad. No, it could not be done. His emotions of the night before had been the result of shock and fatigue and the reaction from past danger. If ever he were to have Ruth, he must win her fairly by faithfulness and industry, and not through a series of blind accidents. Even now, it was possible that she might remember enough of what had occurred to be dreading the fulfillment of her faltered pledge.

Upon their arrival at Boulogne the night before, Monsieur Pelleu had gone ashore in person to telephone to Le Touquet the news of the rescue and to give orders that Ruggles' car should be sent for him the following morning with the necessary articles of clothing. They had been brought to Ruggles' stateroom while he was still asleep.

"She needn't worry," muttered Ruggles to himself. "Unless she gives me some reason, I'll never remind her of it."

He made his toilet, drinking his coffee as he dressed; then went on deck. His resolution had brought back dignity and self-possession. Scarcely glancing for the instant at the others of the group, he walked straight to Ruth, whose face at his approach glowed with a sudden rosy light.

"Good morning, Miss Downing," said he quietly. "I hope you are feeling all right again."

Ruth's eyes, which had brightened at the sight of him, were filled with a swift questioning; and then, as they met Ruggles' steady gaze, the light seemed to fade from them. She introduced him to her father, who took Ruggles' hand in his strong grip and thanked him for the service he had rendered his daughter in a few simple words free from sentimentality; then made way for his son. On the way ashore, Mr. Downing told Ruggles that he had been greatly interested in his singular for-

tunes and his guardianship of the Misses Ben Ali Hamid, and even chaffed him mildly on the sudden elopement of Roxana, which incident had of course found its way into the press. Ruggles turned rather cold and wondered what Mr. Downing would say if he should ever learn the terrible facts connected with the affair and the narrow escape of his beloved daughter from humiliation and death.

To change the subject, he began to talk about the company. Ruggles had also a deeper motive in this topic, and decided to take this opportunity of making a proposition which he had been seriously considering for some time. With this object in view, he said to Mr. Downing, as they stepped out on the quay:

"I wonder if you'd mind riding back with me in my car, sir? I'm a stockholder in the company now, and there are some things I'd like to talk to you about."

Mr. Downing looked rather surprised, but readily assented.

As the big car glided from the quay, Mr. Downing leaned back in his seat, lighted a cigar, and waited for Ruggles to begin. But it was not until they were on the open road that Ruggles came out of his apparent abstraction. He turned to his companion and smiled.

"I want a job, sir," he announced.

Mr. Downing looked at him quizzically.

"Lorenz's job?" he asked. "Or Durand's? Or the general European manager's?"

Ruggles shook his head. There was a flush on his cheeks and his eyes were very bright.

"No, sir," said he, "I don't want anybody's job. What I want is a new one all of my own. I want the general managership of the Far East—Asia and India and Australia. I want to see the Walkeasy shoe for sale in Colombo and Bombay and Calcutta and Singa-

pore and Sydney and Melbourne and Manila and Hongkong and Yokohama." And he proceeded to elaborate his imperial policy for the company.

Mr. Downing tossed his cigar through the window. There was a flush on his own cheeks, now.

"It's a big idea," said he, "but I don't see why not. Look here, can't you come to dine with us to-night? And afterward we can go over this thing with my boy Dick." He gave Ruggles an amused smile. "You seem to have got the thing pretty well worked out," said he.

"I've thought about it a lot," Ruggles answered. "It isn't so much the money proposition, because goodness knows I've got more money than I can spend, right now. It's just the idea of doing something big. Believe me, sir, some men are made to work and some to play, and I guess I'm one of the working kind. I liked to work for the company until it did me dirt, and I lost my head and made a fool of myself. But, you see, I'd sort of outgrown that job. I knew that I was fit for something better. But let me tell you, sir, I've been homesick for the company ever since I left it. And I've got some big ideas for it. Why, Mr. Downing, if this thing is handled right, with the right men in the right places, we could shoe the whole world!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

Ruth sat for half an hour on the hotel terrace, impatiently awaiting her parent and saying to herself highly unflattering things about the speed of Ruggles' limousine. When finally she saw it approaching, she arose in haste and fled to her room. There, ambushed behind a window curtain, she saw Mr. Downing alight and shake hands with Ruggles, and heard him say: "To-night, then, at eight." From which she gathered that Ruggles was to dine with them.

As her father entered, Ruth went forward rather shyly to meet him.

"Hello, Toodles!" said he, and caught her flushed face in his hands and kissed her heartily. "Think we were never coming?"

"What took you so long?" Ruth asked. "Tire down, or can't that big box get over the road?"

"No. We took it easy o' purpose. Been having a long business talk. Good man, Ruggles. Got a clear, steady head on his shoulders. Shouldn't wonder if we managed to do some big business together. He's got the right spirit—the sort of spirit I've always tried to infuse our people with. He impressed me a lot."

Ruth's heavy lashes half hid her sapphire eyes.

"Didn't you talk about anything but business?" she demanded.

"Well, no—not that I remember. Why?"

"Oh—nothing." She turned her shoulder to him, then looked back resentfully. "I only thought, though, that as he saved me from drowning last night, you might have—have——"

Mr. Downing laughed.

"Jealous, hey?" said he. His face grew suddenly grave. "My dear little daughter," said he, "now that you're safe, I don't want to think about that any more than I can help. It's too awful! God!"

He turned away suddenly and went out of the room.

Ruggles dined that night with the Downings. No "shop" was talked during the meal, but Dick drew Ruggles out on his Turkish experiences, listening with the most intense interest to his brief, but graphic descriptions, which were, like all of Ruggles' anecdotes, as impersonal as one can conceive possible. That native modesty which had been a drawback in active commercial life was now an unconscious asset in a social one. It drew to

Ruggles people whom he could never possibly have known had he been self-satisfied.

Mr. Downing spoke but seldom. He confined himself to watching Ruggles and weighing him; and despite his first strongly favorable impressions, he was surprised at his gradually growing conviction that he had fallen far short in his estimate of his youthful guest.

As for Ruth, she scarcely opened her lips. Ruggles observed this reticence and put his own construction on it. He decided that the thought of Roxana still weighed on the girl's mind.

Ruth, on her part, was not thinking at all about Roxana. She had dismissed that primitive from her mind as easily as one might forget the unpleasant sensations of being clawed by a Persian cat. What puzzled and vexed Ruth was the fact that Ruggles and her father had ridden back to Le Touquet in half an hour more than the time required to make the journey and appeared to have talked about nothing else but shoes. She began to wonder if perhaps Ruggles' long devotion to herself might not be less on account of her modest attractions than because she happened to be the daughter of Richard Prouty Downing, president of the Walkeasy Shoe Company of America.

The Downings decided to prolong their stay at Le Touquet, and Ruggles scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry. He and Ruth were clogged in a sargasso sea of misunderstanding.

Ruth could not have told just when she had given her heart to Ruggles, but she knew when she had presented him with the deed to it. That was when, at the approach of the gig from the *Réveuse*, he had loosed his hold of the crate and drawn her to him, and she had returned in full measure his briny kisses.

And now she was hurt and puzzled at his apparent change from the posi-

tion of strong and ardent lover, pleading his cause and demanding his right and compelling it, to what appeared an all-absorbing interest in controlling the shoe market of the world. Ruth could not understand. Had he forgotten what had happened between them out there in the swirling eddies, with death staring them in the face?

The affair was in this unfortunate condition when Ruggles went out late one afternoon for a stroll down to the beach. The weather was chill and misty, and on such days his ankle was apt to become stiff and sore, so he headed for the dunes that flanked the beach, intending to rest for a few minutes on top of one of them before starting back. Wherefore, selecting a dune that seemed to him well removed from the beat of possible sentimental strollers, he attacked it by the flank, clambered to the top, and nearly trod on Ruth, who was nestled in the sparse sedge staring out across the leaden waste of water.

Ruth roused herself with a start and stared up at him almost angrily. Ruggles, who did not lack in powers of observation, saw that her violet eyes held traces of recent tears.

"How did you know that I was here?" she demanded frostily.

"I didn't," Ruggles answered, leaning on his stick and looking down at her. "What are you doing here all by yourself?"

"I felt like being alone for a while," she answered. "No doubt you came here for the same reason. Well, then, I'll go——"

"Sit still," said Ruggles. "I thought a minute ago that I wanted to be alone, but now I know that that wasn't what brought me here. I don't believe in accidents any more. I used to think that life was just a lot of accidents strung out one after the other and that after all it was principally chance that had the most to do with it, and that

all we needed was to keep right on the job and profit by our chance when it came along." He paused.

"It seems to me that is precisely what you've done," said Ruth.

Ruggles nodded.

"Yes," he answered, "that's true enough. But I've come to have a different idea about what makes the chance itself. I guess I got it from talking with Hamid Pasha. I believe now that there's some reason back of these chances—some divine purpose. When we were being swept out there into the Channel by the tide, lying across that crate, the feeling came over me that it was more than blind chance that had drifted you and me together. It seemed as if God had given you to me. I felt that you were mine—just had to be mine. That's the reason I kissed you and held you close to me."

Ruggles' breath was coming quickly. Ruth, her shoulder turned to him, tried to control her emotion enough to speak. It was growing darker, for the long days were past and the approaching fog had blotted out the light in the western sky. Then suddenly a great beam of light swept above their heads, glared for a moment against the wreaths of mist, and vanished.

"I saw that the other night, just before the crate drifted down to us," said Ruggles. "I might not have noticed the crate if it hadn't been for the *Le Touquet Light*."

Again the pale shaft swung above their heads. Ruggles, turning to watch its passage, threw his weight upon his lame ankle and gave a little gasp of pain. Ruth, turning, saw the expression of his face and divined its cause.

"You must sit down," said she gently.

"Then you sit down, too," he answered, "because there's more I want to tell you—if you'll let me."

Ruth hesitated for an instant, then sank back to the glistening sedge. Ruggles flung himself down at her side.

"After we got picked up," said Ruggles, "I began to feel that perhaps I shouldn't have taken advantage of you as I did. It wasn't as if things had been the way they were before Roxana tried to strangle you that night. Miss Chaland told me what she said, and she wasn't sure whether you believed it or not. Did you?"

His clear eyes looked steadfastly into hers. Ruth did not shrink from his gaze. She shook her head slowly.

"No," she answered. "I never believed for a moment what she told me. It was too awful. I felt all the time that she was lying—and she saw it, and it made her furious. I don't think she knew what she was doing. But I couldn't help thinking that there must have been something—" Her voice faltered.

"Ruth," said Ruggles slowly, "will you believe me now if I tell you on my honor that there was never one single thing between Roxana and me that might not have been said or done before anybody, so far as my part of it was concerned?"

Ruth nodded.

"Yes," she answered, rather faintly. "I would believe anything that you told me."

"Well, then," said Ruggles, "I tell you now. I never trusted Roxana from the start. I went out to Constantinople to keep a friend of mine from ruining his life by marrying her. As her guardian, I never had any more to do with her than I could possibly help. Perhaps that was what made her so jealous, because she'd found out that she could do what she liked with most men when it came to making them crazy about her. She was just a wild, crazy

slave woman, and she couldn't stand the idea of another woman being more admired than herself."

Ruth nodded.

"Then don't let's talk about her any more," said Ruggles. "Let's try to forget all about her. Now I want you to tell me something. When we were out there the other night"—he waved his arm toward the misty Channel—"and thought that we might drown—and I told you—and you—you said that it was true"—his voice lowered, but his clear eyes looked deeply into hers—"did all that mean the same to you that it did to me? Did you realize all that it meant—and that it was something more than what might happen to a man and a woman who expected to drown in each other's arms and were clinging together for sympathy and courage? Tell me, Ruth."

Ruth raised her glowing face to his.

"What more can I tell you now than I told you then?" she asked. "You told me out there in the fog that I was to be yours if we were saved—or if we drowned. What did I answer you? Do you think that I would care to die with a lie on my lips? And if I lived—if we both lived, do you think I would care for you less after we had faced death together and I had found you strong and brave—and tender?" Her voice choked. "Oh, my dear—you've acted as if you wanted to break my heart! Couldn't you feel me loving you?"

Ruggles saw her dimly. His strong arms clasped her close and drew her to him, and high above the fair head and the dark one a brightening shaft of light passed once and twice and thrice as if in benediction.



SKIN— —DEEP

By Atkinson Kimball

Author of "The Prince of Mercuria," etc.

IF they hadn't known each other all their lives, Frederick Foster wouldn't have dared to do it. But when you have ridden in the same baby carriage with a girl and gone to the same school and stayed with her and her aunt—weeks at a time while your mother was away—her aunt being your great-aunt—and when you have never felt more than an immense liking for her, why, you are perfectly safe in doing anything.

Frederick Foster felt sure that if he were ever going to fall in love with Madge Barton, he would have done it long before. They had had twenty-three years in Chillicothe to do it in, and three years when she was still in Chillicothe and he was in New York; and they hadn't done it. Danger might lurk in the plan, for some people, but not for them.

Of course, it was unconventional, but Foster scorned conventionality with all the strength of a young writer who believes that conventions are inimical to art, and who has never felt the need of breaking any of them. He had quite a reputation for being an unfettered soul among the group of persons with artistic affiliations who lived in the model tenement he lived in. Perhaps, indirectly, his desire to live up to this reputation had something to do with his

consenting to Madge's plan; for the very afternoon the scheme originated, Julian Trescott had taunted him with his conventionality.

Trescott was calling on him when Miss Derick ran in from her apartment to get some suggestions from Foster for an article she was writing on "the new morality." Miss Derick did free-lance work for the newspapers, wore long jade earrings that hid the tiny, puckering-string wrinkles under her ears, and smoked cigarettes on principle, holding them between her first finger and thumb like a piece of chalk with which she was about to write a problem on some imaginary blackboard.

Suggestions on the theme of Miss Derick's article were Foster's long suit.

"A new morality," he said, "always means the abolition of some form of bondage, the overthrow of some institution. The immorality of yesterday becomes the morality of to-day."

"Oh, wait!" cried Miss Derick, running over to his desk and scribbling on a piece of paper. "Let me get that down word for word. It will make a stunning opening sentence for my article."

"Same old institution getting overthrown, I suppose?" Trescott asked lazily. He was a dramatic critic and culled mannerisms from his favorite

actors. He never talked of the unconventional life which he led as quietly as possible.

Foster threw up his head as if to withstand the onslaught of an outraged public.

"Yes, marriage."

"So you're still resolved never to marry?"

"Never!"

"Never going to fall in love?"

Foster blushed.

"I believe that a writer should be free to take his inspiration where he finds it."

"Well, there's nothing so very new in that. It's just the same old immemorial immorality."

"It will be the new morality when men live openly, for conscience's sake, with the women they love."

Trescott pressed a white hand dramatically against his eyes as if to shut out a horrid vision.

"It sounds worse than marriage! But I might be converted if I found a lovely woman in these rooms defying the world with you. How would *you* feel," he went on, turning to Miss Derick, who was listening with the quivering absorption of a woman whose romances are vicarious, "if you ran in here some day and found Foster living up to that conscience of his?"

"I should think it the most wonderful romance I had ever known!" Miss Derick's jade earrings tinkled with her fervor.

"Romance is dead," Trescott sighed. "In this sordid age, she can find no spot for her dainty foot. But, Foster, you won't defy the world. You never have, you never will. You care too much for the speech of people. Besides, you're as good as gold. Going to accept my invitation to dinner, old top?"

"Sorry. I can't. Previous engagement," Foster answered shortly.

Up to that moment, he had intended

to accept the dinner invitation which Trescott now and then tendered him in acknowledgment of the times he slept on Foster's couch instead of going home to Jersey; but his pride resented the aspersions of being called as good as gold.

"Maybe *she* is his previous engagement. I'd better run home."

Miss Derick got up from the desk in coquettish trepidation. She forgot all about her article on the new morality in the hope that Trescott would transfer his invitation to her. He didn't. He only escorted her over the roof and down the outside staircase to the door of her apartment; but to Miss Derick, even this was a touch of romance.

After they had gone, Foster wandered over to the window and felt that a forlorn and lonesome spell was descending on him like a cloud. The air of late April came through the window; in the little park beneath, the leaves on the buttonball trees were opening; the tide in the East River was swirling toward Hell Gate; on the green bank of Blackwell's Island, two physicians in white duck were having a game of tennis.

His life ought to be expanding like the leaves and rushing like the river. Spring made him excitedly sad and hopelessly expectant. It was a bad time to write. He needed inspiration, and where was he to find it? Suppose he really had had a previous engagement, and was waiting—oh, with what impatience!—for a lovely woman to ring his doorbell!

Suddenly the bell sounded on his door.

His heart turned over. When he opened the door, his heart turned over again; for there, on the landing, stood a woman, young, attractive, flushed, and delicately panting from her climb, a bamboo suit case in one hand and a neat umbrella in the other.

And then he recognized her.

"Well, if it isn't good old Madge! Where in the world did you drop from?"

"Give me time to get my breath," she laughed. "I lost it on the second flight. I have a tale to tell that's long and sad, and only you can give it a happy ending. Going to ask me in?"

In the little entry, she halted. She peeked behind a portière.

"Ice box," she said. She opened the door on the other side. "Bathroom." She stepped out of the entry. "Living room." She stalked on through. "Kitchen—and bedroom."

She came back to the living room, where Foster stood holding her suit case.

"Thank heavens, there are three rooms! I'd be a nuisance sleeping on the kitchen tub. Frederick, prepare to fall on my neck. I'm going to make you a visit."

Foster set down the suit case. Of course she was joking, but he was startled just the same.

"Oh, joy!" he gasped. Something in the girl's face made him add, "Say, Madrigal, are you serious?"

"Serious? Of course I'm serious. I call it pretty serious to be robbed, and that's what's happened to me. I hadn't been in town ten minutes—I was on my way to the Martha Washington—when some villain on the subway platform snatched my hand bag. I screamed and ran after him, but he got away. I dived into the nearest telephone booth and cried until I couldn't see straight. It meant that I'd have to turn right round and go right back to Chillicothe. And then I had my inspiration. You *want* me to visit you, don't you?"

She looked at him appealingly with her frank, intelligent eyes. In spite of her smile, her whimsical mouth was tremulous.

"Oh, Fred, I've been saving up for this trip for three years! For three

years I haven't taken a vacation from the library, so I could have a few weeks in New York to study illustration under Fellows. I've been studying by myself for ages. A little study with Fellows would give me courage to start out as a real live illustrator. By the time I'm a hundred and ten, I might be a real live artist."

Foster wanted Madge to have her chance to study almost as much as she wanted it. Her talent justified her ambition. It was natural that, in her extremity, she should think of staying with him; still, the idea gave him a sinking feeling at the pit of his stomach. It was very unconventional. Somehow, this reasonable, respectable thing was more unconventional than—well, than something different. It would show folks like Trescott that he wasn't afraid to break conventions, but—

"See here, Madge," he began, his dark face flushing, "I'm tremendously sorry for you. I know just how you feel. Of course, I want you to stay with me, but it isn't exactly—usual."

"I know it. But I don't care what people say, if you don't."

"Oh, I don't! But a girl—"

"I feel about my reputation the way the ladies of Cranford felt about their clothes. When they were in Cranford, it didn't make any difference what they wore because everybody knew them, and when they were away, it didn't make any difference because nobody knew them. Anyway, I guess folks will believe I'm your fourth cousin from Chillicothe when they see me. I look like Chillicothe. You couldn't find a hat or a pair of shoes like these in New York." She stuck out a pretty foot in a round-toed, low-heeled Oxford. "Middle West is writ large all over them."

"They look all right to me," Foster said rather absently, and he added, "Don't you think you'd better telegraph your Aunt Lou about your change of plans?"

"I believe you're hoping she'll object," Madge laughed. "But I know how she feels about you. She's always saying that you're as good as gold. I know that if I could ask her this minute, 'Aunt Lou, will it be all right for me to stay with Frederick?' she'd say, 'Oh, it'll be all right for you to stay with him!'"

That settled it. It was too much to have to bear such an invidious compliment twice in the same afternoon.

"All right, stay with me," he said half-defiantly, as who should say, "But you do so at your peril!"

"And now let's eat," Madge said. "I'm starved."

"So am I," Foster answered, suddenly feeling a ravenous hunger such as he hadn't felt in weeks.

Madge looked at him appraisingly.

"You look it. You're as thin as a rail. Do you get your own meals?"

"I get my breakfasts and luncheons—sometimes my dinners," he acknowledged.

"What did you have for lunch to-day?"

"Buttermilk and salad—plenty of oil, you know."

"Plenty of oil! I know." She held out her hand. "Cross my palm with silver. We're going to have a meal as is a meal."

Foster put his pocketbook in her hand.

"Let me go," he protested. "You aren't used to the stairs."

"No, sir! You'd come home with buttermilk and salad. I saw the most fascinating shops of all nationalities near here." She held up the pocketbook. "I'll keep track of what I spend. We're going snooks, fifty-fifty, you know."

She was gone.

Over on Blackwell's Island, the two physicians continued to play tennis, but to Foster they no longer seemed beings in a happier land. The gas tanks at

Astoria, under the spell of the evening's misty radiance, were being transformed into structures of ominous enchantment, but they no longer made him sad. A chum was a great invention.

Two hours later, when the window of the living room framed a Whistler nocturne of purple night with drifting lights of invisible craft, Foster and Madge still lingered over their dinner. The little drop-leaf table with its white cloth, its pot of yellow tulips—which Madge had brought home precariously perched on top of her armful of bundles—the four unpaired brass candlesticks, the burbling coffee machine, all seemed to Foster satisfactory symbols of the friendship between the girl and himself.

"Madrigal," he said, "I'm mighty glad you were robbed."

"So am I. This absolutely suits me."

They smiled at each other over the tulips. When they were together, they were apt to smile at each other out of pure good-fellowship. Always there seemed to be some joke between them that no one else knew—and that they didn't either. Foster had never had a man friend that he felt as comfortable with as he did with Madge Barton, and yet he told himself that he felt toward her as if she were a man.

"How long can you stay?"

"Four weeks."

"Four weeks! What's four weeks? I wish we could go on like this forever! I know I could write better and produce more. I feel the stimulus already."

"The square meal is what you feel. Tell me where is fancy bred, or in the heart or in the head?" In neither. It's bred in the full tummie." Then, seriously, "Here are you and I, perfectly companionable companions, enjoying a friendship too jolly wholesome to be called platonic even; and yet society says we shouldn't live together like this. 'Cause why? 'Cause you're a man and I'm a woman. It makes me tired! I never think of you as a man.

I always think of you as Fred, as *you*, as—I can't explain it."

"I understand," assented Foster. "That's just the way I feel about you. There's no sex flummery about it."

"No, not a bit."

They glowed enthusiastically at each other.

"It's not at all the sort of feeling a man has for a woman he's in love with."

"Oh, not at all."

"This is so inspiring. It's like crisp apples and spring water."

"Or like buttermilk and salad,"

Madge laughed.

"Marriage is like that."

"Ugh! I'm glad I'm never going to marry!"

"That's another thing we're agreed on."

"Husbands and art don't jibe."

"No, nor literature and wives."

"I couldn't have a husband on my mind and have any gumption left for painting."

"If I had a wife on my mind, I'd write worse rot than I do."

"I couldn't cook with one hand and paint with the other."

"Imagine having the same woman around all your life! What could a man say to her? Where could he find any inspiration? Imagine the sort of stuff a writer would produce who knew he *had* to write to support a family! It doesn't do."

"No, it doesn't do." Madge drew off some coffee in a cup. "How's that? Strong enough, think you?"

A little later, when they were washing the dishes, Madge said:

"By the way, I telegraphed Aunt Lou. Maybe she'll answer to-night, and I'll have to take the morning train back to Chillicothe."

"Oh, don't say such things, even in jest!" groaned Foster.

"Well, maybe I wouldn't go back if she told me to. I've as good a right to decide what's right as she has; and I

say this is all right. It *feels* right. There, that's done!" She snapped out the dish mop and laid it across the faucets. "And I'm good and sleepy."

But for an hour or more after this they talked, while the candles on the bookcase burned down to nothing but floating wicks. It seemed as if they could talk forever and not be talked out. They continually recalled things that had happened when they were in Chillicothe, and each felt an irresistible need of reanimating for the other his or her individual life since they had been apart. A half dozen times they said good night, and then began talking again.

"We're just like a couple of fellows," laughed Foster. "At Harvard, I've sat up all night talking. I've seen the dawn in Cambridge more than once."

"Well, I don't want to see the dawn in New York," Madge said. "Good night."

He tried to persuade her to take the bedroom and let him sleep on the couch, but she swept aside all his remonstrances.

"If you insist, I'll leave to-morrow. I'm not going to change your way of living in the slightest."

"Then you'll *have* to leave to-morrow, for you've changed it for the better in a score of ways already."

Madge turned to him, her eyes shining.

"Isn't it fun, Fred?"

"Madge, it's great!"

Often Foster slept poorly, but to-night he felt that he would sleep well. It gave him a cozy feeling to have Madge in the apartment. It took away the lonesomeness that sometimes threatened to overwhelm him. Sometimes the little apartment seemed more cheerless than even a boarding house. Madge made it seem like home. He began to plan the things they would do while she was with him, and he fell into a pleasant drowsiness, anticipating, like a child at the beginning of a vacation, the good

times Madge and he would have to gether.

Suddenly he was wide awake. The doorbell was ringing. He sprang up, thrust his feet into his bedroom slippers, and threw on his dressing gown.

In the living room, the light had been lighted.

"It must be that telegram from Aunt Lou." Madge, in a flowered kimono, turned toward him with the frightened look the thought of a telegram brings to most women.

"Let me get it for you," Foster cried. He felt instinctively that he must conceal her presence. But she opened the door before he could reach it.

"Oh!" she started back. "I thought you were a telegram."

The man on the landing stared at her in dumfounded silence for an instant.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I must have made a mistake. I thought this was Mr. Foster's apartment. Why, hello, Foster!"

"Hello, Trescott!"

Foster stepped out on the landing and closed the door behind him. Trescott pirouetted in the manner of a harlequin, ending his evolution by touching Foster on the shoulder with his forefinger as if it were a wand.

"Behold the transformation! A Don Juan for conscience's sake!"

Foster looked at him coldly.

"I'm sorry you came too late to meet my cousin."

Trescott slapped his forehead.

"His cousin! His cousin! No ingenuity, absolutely no ingenuity! My dear boy, why not be remotely original? Call her your grandmother, your foster sister—anything but cousin. Cousins came over in the ark."

"She is my cousin," Foster's voice was low and level. "Miss Barton from Chillicothe. She's been robbed. She had to stay with me or go straight home."

"Robbed! Utterly banal! Old top,

do use *some* imagination! Robbed! His cousin!"

Again he slapped his forehead.

"She is my cousin," Foster reiterated angrily.

"All right. She is your cousin, and she's a mighty good-looking cousin. How long is she going to stay?"

"Not long enough for *you* to meet her!" Foster said fiercely.

Trescott's joy at getting this rise out of his friend was expressed by another pirouette; and Foster saw that his anger had only confirmed Trescott's suspicion.

"Trescott," he cried impulsively, before he had time to think, "if I tell you something, will you swear to keep it secret? I didn't want to tell any one yet, but circumstances have forced me to tell you. That girl is my cousin, but —also she's my wife."

"Ye fishes and little gods!" Trescott took off his hat and solemnly shook Foster's hand. "Knock me down and jump on me! I might have known you'd come true to type! This afternoon, when you were overthrowing marriage, why, you were married then?"

"Yes," Foster had to assent.

"Magnificent! And romantic—blamed romantic! I envy you. I congratulate you. You're a lucky dog." He sighed. "She's a sweet-looking girl. Be good to her, old boy. I'm sworn to secrecy. Good night. God bless you!"

He wrung Foster's hand and was gone.

"What did he want at this time of night?"

Madge was standing in the middle of the living room, her hands clasped rather tensely.

"Oh, he lives over in Jersey, and he sometimes blows in here and sleeps on the couch rather than go home."

"I'm sorry he was disappointed."

"It won't hurt him to go back to Jersey," Foster said emphatically.

Madge unclasped her hands, then clasped them again.

"He—he didn't think things, did he, Fred?"

"Of course not. He understood the situation exactly, as soon as I explained it to him."

Madge gave a sigh of relief.

"Fred, what's the matter?"

"The matter?"

"You're staring at me as if you'd never seen me before."

"Am I? I guess I'm half asleep. Good night."

"Good night."

Back in his room, Foster sat on the edge of the bed and stared straight in front of him as he had stared at Madge. After a while, he got up, switched off the light, and went over to the window. He stood there a long time. Through the thin partition, he could hear Madge's regular breathing. She was asleep again. It was daylight before he fell asleep.

"Frederick Foster, *what does this mean?*" This was Madge's greeting when he went into the living room for breakfast.

On the drop-leaf table, set invitingly for the late morning meal, was a large florist's box filled with silvery-pink, long-stemmed roses. Madge, with an open note in her hand, sat at the table in the relaxed attitude of a person who has dropped into the nearest chair.

"Read that!"

She flung the note across the table to him.

"The box was addressed to Miss Barton, but the note—well, maybe you can explain that."

Foster read:

MY DEAR MRS. FOSTER: Will you let these roses breathe an apology for my intrusion of last night? I am sorry for your sakes—since you wished to conceal it—that my inopportune call forced the revelation of your secret. But for my sake I can only be glad to have even a small share in so delightful a romance. Be assured that

my lips are sealed. Your husband is a very lucky fellow. My fleeting glimpse showed me that. Sincerely yours,

JULIAN TRESCOTT.

All the blood in Foster's body seemed to rush to his face.

"Madge," he said miserably, "I *had* to tell him that. He wouldn't believe you were my cousin. As soon as I spoke, I knew it was a fool thing to say, and I meant to go and see him this morning and tell him I'd lied to him, and *make* him believe the truth. But I couldn't bear to have him think the things he was thinking. You understand how I came to do it, don't you, Madge?"

She gave a little laugh. She was sitting very erect. Her blue eyes had grown dark and there was a lovely color in her cheeks. Even in his anguish, Foster noticed that anger, combined with a breakfast jacket all ribbon and lace, was exceedingly becoming.

"Yes," she said, "I do understand. I understand that in spite of all you said to the contrary, you care so much for what people say that you resort to ridiculous lies to protect your reputation!"

"Madge, don't be unfair! I wasn't thinking of *my* reputation."

"When I said I didn't care what evil-minded people thought, I meant it. I'm going right back to Chillicothe!"

Foster opened his lips as if to speak; then closed them and turned away from her. Presently he faced her resolutely.

"Madge, I'm going to say something I hadn't intended to. If I said it, I knew you wouldn't stay with me. Now that you won't stay anyway, I'm going to say it. It's the only way to prove that I wasn't thinking of myself when I told Trescott you were my wife. Madge, I love you. I've always loved you, but I didn't know it. When I said you were my wife, why, suddenly my eyes were opened."

Madge stared at him, and all the

anger faded out of her face, with all the color.

"Oh, Fred!" she almost wailed. Then her face lighted up with hope and she added, "But you only imagine it. When you said I was your wife, it made you imagine that you cared for me. You know you have a wonderful imagination."

"Imagine it!" Foster cried, with a vibration in his voice that made Madge catch her breath. He came quickly toward her, and stood looking down at her. She didn't look up. "Don't you suppose I can tell the difference between imagination and a feeling deeper and stronger and different from any I ever dreamed it was possible for me to have?"

"Sit down and let's have breakfast," she said faintly. "Oh, Fred, I'm so sorry! And I'm so mad! It spoils everything! We can never again have the perfect times together we used to have. Here's your coffee."

Foster took his place and faced her miserably over the pot of tulips. He gulped his coffee. Both were too wretched to try to make conversation. When the doorbell rang, Foster sprang up, glad of the momentary diversion of the janitor's morning call.

But it wasn't the janitor.

"Oh, Mr. Foster, good morning! I left my notes on your desk. No, no, I'll get them myself. Besides, I want to ask you a few more questions. Don't apologize for the appearance of your apartment. If you saw my apartment mornings——"

With a spinsterly assumption of exuberant bohemianism, Miss Derick swept aside Foster's protests, pushed past him in the little entry, and opened the door into the living room.

"Oh!" she cried, and stopped stock-still.

One eager, devouring glance had taken in everything—the breakfast table set for two, Madge's silver toilet articles

on the desk, and Madge herself in the becoming breakfast jacket, turning a startled face toward her from behind the coffee machine.

"This is my cousin from Chillicothe. Miss Barton—Miss Derick."

"Oh!" said Miss Derick again.

"Miss Barton had the misfortune to get robbed of all her money as soon as she got to the city, so I'm playing good Samaritan. Won't you have breakfast with us?" Foster pushed another chair to the table.

"No, thank you," said Miss Derick coldly.

Her angular figure stiffened with a quivering hauteur. She raised her eyebrows, and a half smile lifted one corner of her mouth. Plainer than words, her expression said:

"Do you think that I, a respectable woman, am going to break bread with *her*?"

Poor Foster looked as unhappy and embarrassed as he felt. He couldn't defend Madge in Madge's presence, and he knew by experience how futile explanations were.

"What questions did you want to ask me?" he said, with a hazy idea that he was steering away from hidden dangers.

"Oh, when one sees a theory put into practice, one hasn't any questions to ask. How I shall crow over Mr. Trescott! He said you'd never do it, you know."

She laughed a little laugh full of meaning. Madge glanced at Foster, sensitive, suffering, helpless.

"Do what?" she asked.

Miss Derick shook her jade earrings.

"Oh, lots of things. Mr. Foster has always been *my* authority on the unconventional, but he'll be everybody's authority *now*."

"Miss Derick," Madge said, her eyes dark with anger, "I don't see how you can know Fred Foster and think such things about him. I don't care what you think of *me*, but I want you to

know that he is as good as gold—and he's not horrid and unconventional. If you must know it"—her whimsical mouth trembled between laughter and tears—"we're married!"

"Married!" Miss Derick clasped her hands with a gesture of rapturous surprise, then held them out to Madge. "Can you forgive me? It's the most romantic thing I ever heard of!" She held Madge's hands and looked archly over her shoulder at Foster. "When you told Mr. Trescott and me that you'd never marry, why, you were married all the time, weren't you?"

Foster nodded. He couldn't speak. He looked at Madge, trying to read the motive for her glorious lie, but she wouldn't look at him. All that he could be sure of was that she wasn't angry any more.

"I declare," Miss Derick fumbled at her belt for her handkerchief, "it's—it's lovely!" She dabbed her eyes. "I'm going home and tear up my new morality notes. I'm going to write an article on old romance."

At the entry door she paused.

"Some time to-day I'm going to bring you a wedding present. It was one of my mother's wedding presents; it's one of my treasures—a gold medallion teapot, real old medallion."

She looked at Madge with an expression of unselfish joy that made Madge suddenly catch up Trescott's roses and press them into her arms.

Madge and Foster, left alone, stood motionless. Madge spoke first.

"Well," she said tremulously, "I guess I'd better cook another breakfast. We need food after all this excitement."

"Madge, wait!" Foster commanded. "Did you say that through anger, or did you mean that you'd marry me?"

"It looks as if I'd have to marry you. I can't accept wedding presents and not have a wedding, can I?"

When they finally sat down to breakfast, it was luncheon time.

"There's a strenuous afternoon ahead of us," Foster said. "We've got to get married before anybody finds out we're not married. We've got to live up to our reputation. It's a hardship, but it's got to be done."

Their eyes met above the pot of tulips, and they smiled with a frank joy in their mutual joy.

"I don't believe I'll marry you after all," Madge said. "A wife and literature don't jibe."

"You'd better not talk! How about a husband and art?"

"Weren't we geese? I guess I'll marry you so I can go in for art and have my lessons with Fellows. Otherwise I'd have to go back to Chillicothe." She paused. "Isn't it queer? Before we knew we loved each other, we thought it was all right to share these rooms, and now we couldn't. Oh, Fred, isn't life fun?"

Foster got up, went around the table, and took her in his arms.

"Madrigal, darling, I'm going to make you proud of me. I'm going to write. I've lacked incentive, inspiration. Now I have everything."

"I'm afraid," Madge said after a moment, "that our marriage will shock Aunt Lou. She's so unprepared."

Just how much of a shock, they found out a little later. A telegram came from Aunt Lou. The superscription made Madge and Foster gasp. Then they shouted with laughter. It was addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Foster. Foster tore open the envelope.

Was away. Didn't get your telegram until this morning. Bless you, my children. Knew you'd find it out some day.

"What did you say in your telegram?" Foster asked when he could speak.

"I didn't want to tell her in a telegram that I'd been robbed. I knew it would worry her. So I only said, 'What do you say to my keeping house with Frederick?'"



What makes the super-woman? Is it beauty? Cleopatra and Rachel were homely. Is it daintiness? Marguerite de Valois washed her hands but twice a week. Is it wit? Pompadour and Du Barry were avowedly stupid in conversation. Is it youth? Diane de Poitiers and Ninon de l'Enclos were wildly adored at sixty. Is it the subtle quality of feminism? George Sand, who numbered her admirers by the score—poor Chopin in their foremost rank—was not only ugly, but disgustingly mannish. So was Semiramis. Here are the stories of super-women who conquered at will. Some of them smashed thrones; some were content with wholesale heart-smashing. Wherein lay their secret? Or rather, their secrets? For seldom did any two of them follow the same plan of campaign.

BETTY CASTLEMAINE: THE DRESDEN-SHEPHERDESS SINNER

SHE was a quaint little Dresden-shepherdess sinner. One can no more work up a thrill of righteous indignation against her than against the Persian kitten that upsets and smashes a costly ornament, during its stroll on mantel or bookshelf top. She didn't have a redeeming trait to her back. She was wicked—but she was daintily wicked. And she never slipped from the key by attempting tragedy. She was no Borgia or Messalina or Brinvilliers. I am glad she wasn't. For it is refreshing to get away from Bowery melodrama and back to light comedy.

She was just an adorably charming creation of fluffy wickedness, this super-woman of ours. And she managed, withal, to do quite as much damage as if she had strutted around with a property dagger in one hand and a

half-pint flask of cold poison in the other.

She began life as the Honorable Barbara Villiers; then she became Lady Castlemaine; and, last of all, by diligent attention to business, she was created Duchess of Cleveland. But, then and now, she was known as Betty Castlemaine.

You can't possibly associate high tragedy or sordid crime with a girl who is called "Betty." As easily imagine a Ouida hero named Simeon, or a pugilist with the name of Claude or Marmaduke.

I think Betty will amuse you. She may even shock you. But she will neither bore nor horrify you.

Yes, the preamble, as usual, is much too wordy. So let's get to the story.

Her father, a gallant nobleman, died when Betty was a child. Her mother, a

fashionable disreputable, speedily married again. Betty grew to young womanhood at her stepfather's estate.

But when she was fifteen, a local squireen lost his heart to her. She returned the compliment, and her stepfather hustled her off to London, to make her forget.

There, at sixteen, she won the worship of the dashing young Earl of Chesterfield, ousting several older and more sophisticated claimants to his notice. This was back in 1656, yet the affair began as might the present-day flirtation between a schoolgirl and a *matinée* hero; as witness Betty's one recorded love letter to Chesterfield:

MY LORD: Lady Hamilton and I are now together, contriving how to get your company this afternoon. If you desire this favor, you will come and see us at Ludgate Hill at about three o'clock, at Butler's shop, where we shall expect you.

BARBARA VILLIERS.

Yes, her stepfather had assuredly done a clever thing in removing Betty from the temptation of the country squire and bringing her up to London, where he could personally keep a chaperoning eye on her.

The Chesterfield romance was brief and violent. When it was broken off, Betty found herself in sudden and urgent need of a wedding ring. Chesterfield could not supply this trinket, as he already had a perfectly good wife living. So Betty was in the position of the immortal spinster who advertised:

WANTED: One husband (preferably white).

Luckily her almost hypnotic power of charm came to her aid at this crisis. She met a youth of ancient family, but reduced fortune—one Roger Palmer, who was studying law at the Temple. Betty cast her net of fascination around Palmer, and without a struggle, he fell adoringly at her feet. She told him of her plight, with a frankness as praiseworthy as it was unavoidable.

While the confession did not add to his happiness, he was far too hopelessly in love with Betty to allow a mere detail, like an impending left-handed offspring, to deter him from making her his wife. And so—as my literary model, Laura Jean, would say—they twain were wed. Just before the duet in love's sweet song became a trio.

For a time, they lived happily enough. Betty seemed touched by her husband's chivalry in accepting her "as is." Also, she was a little scared by the lesson she had learned. But at seventeen life lessons are more tragic than permanent. Betty met Chesterfield again. Her husband found out. And there were terrible scenes in the Palmer home.

The deadlock was soon broken; in fact, doubly broken. Chesterfield killed a man in a duel. Oliver Cromwell was ruling England just then, and duels were frowned on. A sheriff's posse started on a race, with the nimble Chesterfield as pacemaker. Nor did the officers of the law check their pursuit until the noble earl was safely hidden in France, far from the reach of British justice.

Almost directly afterward, the Palmers went to Holland, where the crownless king, Charles II., was holding his impecunious court. Palmer by this time was a full-fledged lawyer, and English Royalists had hired him as a go-between in their plots to restore Charles to his father's overturned throne.

At Breda, where Charles was sponging a living from the pockets of fanatical Royalists, Betty made an instant sensation. Charles himself was just then too deeply enthralled with Lucy Walter—whom some historians believe he secretly married—to notice her. But his sour-faced younger brother, James, Duke of York—for whom New York was named—tumbled clumsily into love with her; much to Palmer's grief.

Then Chesterfield turned up at Breda. He had the kindest memories

of Betty, and, to show his gratitude, he brought her to Charles' attention. Almost at once, she supplanted poor Lucy Walter. The throneless sovereign went mad over the dainty wife of his go-between agent.

"Neither his majesty nor any other," writes a Restoration chronicler, "could resist her smile. She was maddeningly, dazzlingly, triumphantly, beauteous of face."

Then Oliver Cromwell died. His commander in chief, General Monk, thriftily sold out the Cromwellian cause to the Royalists. And Charles II. came back to England as king, amid the enthusiastic plaudits of his people. They would have been more sensible to cheer a typhoid-fever germ than this worthless Stuart monarch. But they were sick of the strait-laced ways of the Cromwell days. They believed that their new king would inject a little gayety into the national life, and they were not disappointed. For Charles at once inaugurated an era of jollity, of corruption, of extravagance, of reckless vice, that all but swamped his kingdom—morally, financially, and in national prestige.

The star of the newly restored king's court was Betty. She was in her element. Palmer was now well to do and a member of Parliament. He lived in a big house in King Street, Westminster, next door to the diarist, Pepys.

But Betty was not satisfied. She was always kind to this helplessly complaisant spouse of hers. She coaxed Charles into creating him "Baron of Limerick and Earl of Castlemaine."

As Countess of Castlemaine, Betty had a solid position at court, beyond that which her mere fascination had won for her. She was a lady of title. Incidentally, she was the idol of fifty lordly gallants. But it is ever unsafe to "love where the king loves," and for the most part these admirers were shrewd enough to keep their distance.

By the way, Charles had a curiously offhand way of lavishing titles, as witness his note, still extant, elevating Palmer to the peerage. To one of his ministers he scribbled, on October 16, 1661:

Prepare a warrant for Mr. Roger Palmer to be Baron of Limerick and Earl of Castlemaine, in the same form as the last, and let me have it before dinner.

His sprawly signature scratched at the foot of the warrant therewith lifted the humble lawyer into the House of Lords. Yes, Palmer certainly had a considerate and helpful wife.

Betty, remembering the rumor of Charles' secret marriage to Lucy Walter, began to have dreams of her own. Her influence over the king was limitless. And the title of "queen consort" had a goodly sound to her. She took to looking speculatively at the worthy Earl of Castlemaine, her husband, and to reading up on the divorce laws.

Others seem to have shared her idea that this impossibility might come to pass, for most of the courtiers were already treating her with the respect due a queen. Charles probably noticed, but he said nothing. He had ever a quaint sense of humor.

Then, like the dear old overworked and ever-useful thunderclap, came news of the king's approaching marriage to Catherine of Braganza, a Portuguese princess.

Betty so far forgot herself as to show the sharp claws that lurked under the velvety paws. She went into a tantrum that made her adherents' lives a horror while it lasted. She was given to bursts of kittenish rage, and she could always produce them, to order, at moments when they would best serve her turn. But this was the real thing. Even the king kept out of her way. As for her husband!

The bitterest goad to this brain storm of Betty's was the way the courtiers,

who had lately been paying queenly homage to her, now proceeded to make up for the error by snubbing her most unmercifully. They thought her day was done. Instead—like J. P. Jones, of Revolutionary memory—she had just begun to fight.

The first move in her battle for reinstatement was to make Charles appoint her chief lady in waiting to the new queen. Thus she would forever be on the ground and able to take advantage of every chance to win the king back to herself. Not to keep you in suspense, her plans succeeded in every detail.

The royal marriage was duly solemnized, and Catherine of Braganza became Queen of England. She was a dumpy little swarthy-faced creature, this Portuguese girl, homely, gentle, and affectionate. From the very first, Charles grossly neglected her. And the dutiful court followed his example. The foreign queen was left lonely and miserable in her almost deserted suite of the palace, to amuse herself as best she could, while king and court reveled throughout the rest of the building.

But Catherine did not yield to Betty her own rightful place in Charles' heart without a struggle, the pitiful struggle of a stupid and gentle good woman to keep her husband away from a clever bad woman. ("Mary, pity women!"—the gentle, stupid, good ones!) I don't need to tell you how that feeble attempt ended, but it *began* by Catherine's refusal to receive Lady Castlemaine at any court function or to permit her to be presented. Here is the scene that followed, at the first palace reception given in honor of the new queen:

Betty was announced, among a string of other courtiers. By arrangement with the usher, her name was mumbled. The queen, who had never seen her, and who did not at all catch the name, greeted her right graciously. As Betty, smiling blissfully, passed on, Catherine

heard some one address her as "Lady Castlemaine." —

The queen realized too late the cruel trick that had been played upon her. She had been duped into receiving her enemy, and thus of making secure Betty's shaky position at court. Catherine collapsed on the floor in a dead faint, a red stain from a burst blood vessel staining her ermine robe. Betty looked back in innocent alarm at the senseless woman.

This was too much for the ultra-respectable and plain-spoken old Duchess of Richmond, who turned upon the winner of the bout with a loud-shrieked tirade of Billingsgate abuse that would make a water-front gin juggler crawl in shame under his own bar. The duchess wound up her speech with the kindly hope that Betty might die in a ditch.

It was a pleasant evening for nearly every one there.

Just one more blow was struck in Catherine's futile combat to hold her own against her lovelier rival. And that blow was struck by a man.

The Earl of Clarendon, wisest and most honest of Charles' advisers, took up the cudgels in behalf of the injured little queen. Frankly, he told the king how all decent people regarded Betty's continued presence at court; and he added certain unpleasant truths about a husband—king or no king—who would allow his wife to be treated as Betty was treating the queen. Charles replied to Clarendon's protest by the ensuing letter:

Nobody shall presume to meddle in the affairs of the Countess of Castlemaine. Whoever dares to do so will have cause to regret it to the last hour of his life. Nothing will shake the resolution I have taken with regard to her, and I shall consent to be miserable in this world and the next if I yield in my decision, which is that she shall continue a lady in waiting to the queen. I shall to the last hour of my life regard any one who opposes me in this as my enemy;

and whosoever shows himself hostile to the countess will, I swear by my honor, earn my undying displeasure.

Betty had the credit of dictating this remarkable epistle. She assuredly incited it. It put an immediate end to any effort to oust her from the palace. Yet the backbone of her power was broken, although she did not know it. Says Trowbridge:

"Great as was her victory and long as her sway lasted, it is doubtful if Lady Castlemaine's power over the king, marked as it was by plunder of the state, was ever so real as before the arrival of the queen. For some ten years or more, it is true, she continued a sort of *maitresse en titre*, but never before or since was such a position assailed by so many storms or filled by a woman whose actions were so calculated to cause her to forfeit it.

"No royal mistress has ever treated her lover so brutally, so faithlessly, as Lady Castlemaine treated Charles, and continued to be a power. He liked wit, and she had none; he liked peace in his establishment, and she scolded him like Xanthippe; he liked flattery, and she reviled him; he dreaded ridicule, and she made him the laughingstock of his court and the jest of his people.

"It is true she had beauty, but others were more beautiful. And yet, after the chains that bound him to her—many times snapped—were finally broken beyond repair, this strange couple continued on good terms. Perhaps psychologists may explain the secret of her hold over him, for never was connection between such a king and such a woman so inexplicable."

Only once did Charles flare into real anger against Betty. That was when he overheard her speak slightly of the luckless queen.

He curtly ordered her to leave the palace. She went. But three days later she returned "to fetch away her baggage." A reconciliation followed, and

she stayed on. Her hold over him seemed magical—a hold whose secret, one would say, was the utter fearlessness of her made-to-order rages. Under that terrible lash, Charles used to cower like a whipped puppy.

Presently the king gave her a new title—Duchess of Cleveland. The ducal coronet sat prettily on Betty's fluffy hair, and it gave birth to a witticism that set the whole court to chuckling.

The royal chaplain one Sunday gave out this Biblical text for the morning's sermon:

"A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband."

"The Duchess of Cleveland is at least a coronet to hers," audibly remarked some one in the congregation.

But Betty's unfortunate—or fortunate—husband no longer reaped the benefit of his wife's gay sins. He was of no more use to her. She was tired of his eternal complaints about her conduct. So she left him and took up permanent quarters at the Whitehall palace.

Whereat, friend husband went into a monastery, but he emerged a few years later and dabbled in politics. I don't know what then befell him. He had served his turn.

Charles' love for Betty was more permanent than exclusive. In one sense, her position was supreme and unrivaled. In another, she was but one of many, especially as the years went on. She was a philosophical girl. Instead of wasting time in jealousy, she merely smiled on several of the countless outsiders who adored her.

But there was this difference between Charles' infidelities and hers: The king could do no wrong—for which he could be brought to account; whereas, he was so fiercely jealous of Betty that her own wanderings into forbidden fields must needs be guarded by every possible secrecy.

Which brings us by degrees to "Handsome Jack" Churchill.

Churchill was a young adventurer, of quasinoble stock, who had decided to succeed in life and who placidly sacrificed everything to that ambition. Among these sacrifices, soon or late, were his sister's honor, his own, and his king's, his sworn oath, the faith that others were foolish enough to repose in him, every shred of manhood, common honesty, and decency.

He was the trusted adherent of four successive English sovereigns, and he deceived them all. In love affairs, he was irresistible. He sold his favors, for cash, like any street woman, and built his fortune on the money he cajoled his sweethearts into giving him. The price of his sister's shame gave him his first start.

Shrewd, heartless, conscienceless, brilliant, a supercrook, he rose to dizzy heights; then slumped to a disgraced, semi-imbecile old age. He is still proclaimed as one of England's deathless heroes.

You probably remember him better by his title than by his family name. He was the first Duke of Marlborough, victor of Blenheim and founder of the present ducal dynasty of Marlborough, a dynasty into which American blood has now been infused.

But in the days of Betty Castlemaine's glory, the future Duke of Marlborough was still merely Jack Churchill, gentleman-adventurer. He fell in love with Betty, as did every one, and she returned his love. Not only did she return it, but she—the sublimely selfish cash seizer—squandered huge sums of money on him, at his demand.

Churchill had his court fortunes to make. Betty had her court fortunes to lose. Therefore, the affair was of the most clandestine sort. But it narrowly escaped detection.

Once, when Charles was supposed to be gone for the day on a regal debauch

at Richmond, he came back unexpectedly to Whitehall and went at once to Betty's suite. Now, it chanced that Jack Churchill had heard that the king was to be away, so he had called on Betty, being smuggled upstairs to her apartments by a private stairway.

Charles' sudden return was no accident at all. A noble, whom Betty once had flouted, had ferreted out the secret of Churchill's secret meetings with her. He had told the king, adding that her Grace of Cleveland was supporting the penniless Churchill out of the money she wrung from the royal treasury. Wherefore, Charles had set this trap for the two.

A scared maidservant dashed into Betty's drawing-room with news of the king's approach. Churchill had all his wits about him. Without a second's pause, he dived straight out through the window. Better the risk of a broken neck than the certainty of a broken career.

He landed in the courtyard below, somewhat bruised and jarred by the perilous leap, but not too badly hurt to scramble to his feet and scurry out of sight.

Charles burst into the drawing-room—and found Betty dozing on a couch. With all his failings, the king was anything but a fool. He saw the open window; he noted Betty's convulsively clenched hands; and he realized that he was one second too late. Forcing himself to speak lightly, he said, as she ran forward with a cry of glad surprise, to greet him:

"There was no need for him to take such a silly risk. Tell him so. And tell him I forgive him—since he does it for his bread."

As Betty, with a really fine pretense of amaze, started to ask him to explain this cryptic speech, he laughed:

"Oh, you are all alike! None good, none true! As for me, I am past jealousy."

The populace tried hard to hate Betty. They knew she was the king's chief assistant in the task of draining the treasury. But so beautiful was she, and so gracious and engaging, withal, that they howled themselves hoarse with delight whenever she appeared in public. She and Nell Gwyn were the only two of Charles' favorites who were not greeted by hisses and filthy threats whenever they stirred abroad.

One of the chief uses to which Betty put her bursts of pseudo-temper was to wring gifts from easy-giving Charles. He hated a scene, and, to avoid one, he would always consent to part with money—which was the people's—and with titles—which cost him nothing.

For example, after one quarrel, he gave her one hundred and fifty thousand dollars to pay her debts and a present of Berkshire House, a magnificent estate. It was also after such a quarrel that she wheedled him into making her Duchess of Cleveland. Says Burnet:

"To this woman, titles were of as little account as silver in the house of King Solomon. What she wanted was cash, cash to squander upon her pleasures, cash to pay her enormous debts. She was ravenous."

Here is an incomplete list of her official graft:

The customs were "farmed" for her benefit to the yearly extent of fifty thousand dollars. She received another annual fifty thousand dollars out of the tax on beer, and twenty-five thousand dollars a year out of the post-office revenue. Enormous sums from the Irish treasury reverted to her. She charged everything, on her wholesale shopping expeditions, to the privy purse. All offices that fell vacant, spiritual or temporal, were auctioned for her benefit.

Yet this ceaseless shower of gold ran through her hands like water. She would often lose as much as one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars

at play in one night. Her usual stake at dice was from five thousand dollars to seven thousand five hundred dollars.

Charles was sometimes actually impoverished by her demands. The very servants at Whitehall had not enough food. Betty even appropriated money set aside for the royal stationery.

It is as impossible as unprofitable to cite a full roster of her lovers. Her tastes were broad and catholic and embraced every rank and kind, from her cousin, the great Duke of Buckingham, down to the agile Jacob Hall, a tight-rope walker, and to Hart, the actor, grandnephew of Shakespeare.

The king knew of these amours, but he could not prove them, and she stayed on. Why did Charles let her rob and fool him? Because she was a superwoman. Why did the people let Charles rob them for her? Because he was king.

It is quite impossible, nowadays, and in America especially, to realize what the word "king" used to mean in Europe, and how many sins it covered. True, the English had tired of Charles' father and had cut off his head, but that was the exception that proved the rule.

"King" was a title regarded as only a shade less sacred than "God." And it took the world at large something like sixty centuries to get over that belief. Here is an incident that shows how the royalty idea could possess an otherwise great man of semimodern times:

Dissolute George IV., in the nineteenth century, paid a state visit to Scotland. He was the first English monarch in all history to enter Scotland, except at the head of an invading army, and the Scotch turned out to give him a fitting welcome.

A reception committee boarded the royal yacht in the harbor, and during the speechmaking, the king drained a glass of champagne to Scotland's prosperity. Sir Walter Scott, who was one of the committee, sprang forward and

entreated his majesty to give him the glass from which he had just drunk, that it might be preserved forever in the country's archives as a hallowed relic.

King George good-naturedly handed him the fragile glass. Sir Walter took it with as much reverence as if it had been the Grail. (For safe-keeping, he placed it in his coat-tail pocket; then, forgetting that it was there, he sat down.) Which is a deviation from our story, but mildly interesting, perhaps. And so back to Betty Castlemaine.

A son was born. Betty wanted Charles to make her pseudo-regal baby a duke. The king did not like the idea. Betty caught up the child and held him suspended out of a window over a courtyard.

"Give the brat a title," she stormed, "or I'll let him drop!"

The bluff caught the king's fancy. He replied in kind:

"Don't drop the little duke. Wait, at least, until I can sign his patent of nobility."

But no royal favorite endured forever, with Charles. The years began to take their toll of Betty, and she was growing fat. She left court, after a quarrel which she started and which Charles refused to end. She had gambled once too often on her powers of fascination, forgetting—or not believing—that those powers were on the wane.

So the discredited favorite went into retirement, living most of the time in France and, despite her flesh and her advancing years, still winning hearts.

Her former husband died in 1705, and a little later she married a blackleg named Fielding. She was nearly sixty-three, and her wealth and prestige were gone, yet she still had power to capture the heart and hand of the good-looking scoundrel who became her second husband, and who was twenty years her junior.

And a horrible life he led her. He robbed her of what little money she still had; he was as unfaithful to her as she had been to Palmer and to Charles; and he used to beat her, unmercifully. One day he even drew his sword on her, yelling:

"It were no more sin to kill an old Jezebel like you than to kill a dog!"

Poor, terrified Betty appealed to her children for protection against the beast. One of her sons looked up Fielding's record and found he had had a wife living when he married Betty. The bigamist was sent to prison, and Betty, crushed in spirit, retired to a small house at Cheswick. There she lived on in poverty and increasing ill health, for a year or two.

She died, at last, unloved, alone, forgotten by all the host of men who had once vowed eternal allegiance to her.

It seems a pity not to wind up this article with a few prim moral reflections. But, on second thought, the career of Betty Castlemaine supplies its own moral reflections—especially the last scenes of it.

The September number of AINSLEE'S will contain the next article in Mr. Terhune's Super-Women series: "Eugénie, Empress of the French."





WHEN TIME AND ETERNITY MEET

By Cyrus Townsend Brady

Author of "Richard the Brazen," "My Lady's Slipper," etc

HOW long since you have heard from him?" asked the man.

"Over two months," answered the woman.

"And since he was reported missing?"

"Six weeks yesterday."

"They said he was probably dead?"

"Yes."

"What's the use of waiting any longer? I have money, friends in the city, work, in spite of my lameness."

"I know."

"Let us go, then. There is no more dangerous spot on earth than this cottage between the lines. If the enemy come, even I can't protect you."

The woman shook her head.

"Not until I know that he is dead," she said.

"The chances are millions to one against his being alive," urged the man earnestly.

"I've been a traitor to him already in my heart, with you," began the woman passionately, "but it will have to stop there until— What is that?" she cried in a low whisper, breaking off the sentence and turning toward the door.

The sound of faint, but hurried footsteps on the gravel path came into the room. Some one was running toward the house. Every one unknown was a possible enemy. The woman shrank closer to the lame man, her terror showing in the white of her cheek and the stare of her eyes. He put his arm about her and seized a curiously gnarled and

knotted stick, half cudgel, half crutch, that he was accustomed to depend upon and that would make a terrible weapon in the hands of a strong man; and he was strong, this cripple, at least from the waist up.

"Courage," he whispered. "I will protect you with my life."

The footsteps stopped on the porch, a hand fumbled at the latch.

"Locked?" asked the man.

"Yes," whispered the woman.

"There's only one of them evidently," returned the man, taking a step toward the door.

The woman clung to him, holding him back.

"Wait! It may be a trick," she whispered.

The hand knocked on the door. Some decision must be made by those within, for the light in the room would tell the newcomer that it was occupied.

"Shall I?" whispered the woman.

The lame man nodded.

"Who's there?" she quavered uncertainly, raising her voice.

"I," instantly came the reply in low, but clear tones, heard faintly through the door. "Your husband," the voice without added.

"Great God!" exclaimed the lame man under his breath, sinking down into a chair.

"You see," said the woman, softly, yet bitterly. "The millionth chance! Go out quickly, that way."

Seizing the cudgel, the lame man noiselessly, but swiftly limped across the room and went out of the back door. As he closed it behind him, the woman walked to the front door, unbarred it, lifted the latch. Immediately a man staggered into the room. He had been pressed close against the outside of the door. He was white, breathless. As the light fell upon him, the woman started back in surprise. She screamed faintly.

"I thought——" she began.

The man was dressed in the uniform of the enemy.

"No wonder," he said. "These things deceive you."

He tore off the metal helmet, threw it to one side. He ripped open the blue uniform coat and cast it behind him, standing revealed in his own short gray tunic. The next moment he had the woman in his arms. He kissed her frantically, passionately, with the intensity of one who had never expected to enjoy that privilege again, as one might kiss the dead, did they come back. He swept her to his breast in a perfect whirlwind of love and rapture. So mighty was his own passion that he did not realize that she made no return. So strongly did he hold her that her slight effort at withdrawal went for nothing.

"Oh, how I have longed for this moment! I have lived to see you again!"

He released her from his embrace; then he put his hands on her shoulders and looked at her hungrily, drinking in the beauty of her face and figure. Under his fierce scrutiny, she drooped her head.

"Food," he said at last, letting go of her completely, "and drink. I am famished. But first another kiss."

He drew her to him again.

"You were reported missing—probably killed—six weeks ago," she said.

"Yes, I was wounded slightly and captured. Yesterday I escaped from the hospital. So long as I was there, I

thought I might as well do a little investigating within the enemy's lines. Information is of the utmost value, you see."

"Yes."

"Unfortunately they captured me today and sentenced me to death as a spy, but I escaped from them half an hour ago. I headed for our own lines, and as I am sure I have thrown them off the scent, I stopped here just for a sight of you, for one embrace and something to eat and drink. Then I must go. I could stand here talking to you forever, but make haste, dear heart. I have valuable information for the general and I must be away."

Obediently the woman turned toward the door that opened into the kitchen, glad to be of service and to relieve the tense strain upon her by action. She unwittingly disclosed, as she stepped aside, what had before been hidden by her person—a man's hat lying on the floor. Among those simple peasants, garments were worn for a long time, and the longer they were worn, the more they partook of the individuality of the wearer. He recognized the hat at once; it belonged to the lame man. No, the lame man had not been a rival, but he had loved the woman before she had married and he had taken defeat badly. He was well to do and the soldier poor, but that had made no difference to the woman—then. His lameness had kept him out of the army so far.

The woman's back was turned to her husband. She could not see his face, but his sudden question shot terror to her heart.

"What is that?" he cried harshly, in a voice utterly changed.

She threw up her head and looked back. But she was saved the necessity of answering the impossible question, for the glass of the window was suddenly splintered, and brown gun barrels tipped with gleaming bayonets ap-

peared through the broken sashes on either side. Simultaneously the door, which she had forgotten to lock when her husband came in, was burst open. The house had been surrounded while the two within, absorbed in their own concerns, had heard nothing. The room was instantly filled with helmeted soldiers, an officer with a drawn sword at their head.

"Well," he said sharply, "you led us a merry chase, my friend, but we've got you again."

The woman shrank back against the wall and stared in a silent agony of apprehension. The soldier drew himself up, saluted, and stepped close to the officer.

"This is my wife," he said clearly; and then, "Please back up what I say," he added in a hasty whisper, as two of the privates seized him by the arms.

The officer nodded. It appeared that he had some kindly feelings in his heart. The soldier raised his voice once more.

"Yes, I will go with you, but this time as a prisoner of war, you understand. See, I have cast aside your uniform. It lies yonder, and I am no longer within your lines."

"Very well," said the officer, promptly comprehending the little deception the condemned man was practicing for the benefit of the woman, and willing to humor him. "Fall in the prisoner."

At the command, the men promptly ranged themselves in ordered ranks, the prisoner in their midst. But before he gave the word to march, the officer said: "Your wife—you want to say good-by?"

The woman started forward, but the soldier checked her with his hand. For the second time his glance fell on the hat by the door. The woman followed it, saw, understood. Her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, yet she strove desperately to speak.

"Not—not——"

What was she about to say as she stood there clenching the table, pity and entreaty in her eyes? Was it, "Not guilty"? The man raised his hand in salute to her; he smiled at her slightly, pityingly, the passion gone from his vision.

"Good-by," he said. "God bless you. May you be happy."

And before the woman could speak, the room was empty; only the unlatched door, swinging to and fro in the night wind, and the broken glass on the floor, told of the tragedy. She heard the soldiers tramping down the gravel walk and then out on the hard road. She sank down at the table and buried her face in her hands, and sobbed in long, shuddering, agonized breaths.

"They have gone. It's all right now," said the lame man, opening the door at the back, peering cautiously in, and then stepping toward her.

A few rods away, the road, which had run through trees, suddenly touched the upper side of a sunken meadow. There was a rocky wall along part of the field. The ground in front of the rocks was level. A brook meandered sluggishly through the lowest part of the depression. It was a bright, moonlight night.

"This place will do," said the officer, halting the detachment.

"It is rather near the cottage," said the soldier.

"Can't be helped," was the reply. "You stand over there with your back against that scarp of rock."

The man walked slowly over and took his place facing the meadow, with the moon shining full in his face. He was clearly outlined against the stone face of the wall.

"Sergeant," continued the officer, "place your firing squad here, take this handkerchief, and blindfold the prisoner."

"A favor, captain, if you please," said

the man quickly. "Don't blindfold me, don't bind me. Escape is impossible this time."

The officer nodded.

"As you will." He stepped outside the line of fire. "Ready!" he cried sharply to the squad of men detailed as executioners.

"Another favor if the captain pleases," said the man.

"What is that?"

"Will you give me a few moments for my prayers and allow me to give the signal to fire myself?"

"It is most unusual," returned the officer gruffly, "but——"

"Please, captain, please!" pleaded the man.

"Very well. Only don't pray too long. We've wasted a lot of time over you already."

The man nodded.

"When I raise my hand so, comrades," he said, "then you may fire."

He closed his eyes and stood motionless. Into the ken of his vision—by what strange process, mental and spiritual, who can say?—came once more the room he had just quitted. As if he stood in it again, the tiniest detail was revealed to the eye of his imagination. The two actors in the real tragedy of his life, beside which that which he was now confronting was as nothing, were plainly revealed to him. He saw every movement, he heard every word that was said, as if he had been there.

"He's gone," said the lame man.

"Yes, I know," said the woman. "A prisoner of war."

"A spy."

"But——"

"They said that merely to deceive you."

"Then they will kill him?"

"Shoot him out of hand. I did it," resolutely continued the man, dropping his cudgel to the floor and laying on the table a heavy revolver that he had been carrying.

"You?" cried the woman, her voice rising almost to a scream.

"Yes. They were searching for him. I gave them the clew. He'll be out of our way forever in a moment. You can come with me now."

The woman had risen to her feet. The lame man took a step toward her and held out his arms, smiling.

"There's nothing between us now," he said passionately. "You are free."

"Traitor!" cried the woman. "You betrayed him!"

"Would you not have it so?" he queried in amazement.

"Coward!" she exclaimed. "I've been a fool, mad! When I look at you, I wonder how I could have been so blind!"

"I do not understand."

"Understand? The moment I saw him again, I knew that I loved him."

"And me?"

"You I hate!"

"Hate or not," said the man grimly, "you are going with me now. I may have damned my soul for you"—her taunts rankled, it seemed—"but now I am going to have my reward."

"Out of my way!" said the woman swiftly.

"Where are you going?"

"To him, to tell him I love him, to beg his forgiveness, to——"

"Don't be a fool!"

Stooping, he seized the cudgel, which he lifted threateningly as if to cow her; whereat she seized the pistol on the table and cocked it instantly.

"It's too late, I tell you," he went on. "He had been tried as a spy before. They'll shoot him at the first open place they come to in the road—the sunken meadow, if they went that way. They've probably done it already. You can't tell a dead man anything. Drop that revolver. Be reasonable. You'll get over this. Come with me."

He suddenly seized the woman and sought to take from her the weapon

with which she had covered him. Although he was a man of great strength of arm and shoulder, he could make little impression upon the woman, who seemed to be wrought up to the pitch of frenzy. They struggled violently. The table went over with a crash. With a savage grip on her right arm, he shook the revolver free. It fell, and as it fell, it struck the leg of the table. There was a crash of sudden sound, a little cloud of smoke in the room. The woman went limp in his arms. In his surprise he released her, and before he could catch her again, she sank down in a heap on the floor. The bullet had torn its way through her breast.

"I can go to him now—" she whispered brokenly, "and tell him—that I love him—and ask forgive—"

Her voice faltered and stopped.

The firing party staring at the condemned soldier saw him open his eyes suddenly, widely. He lifted his head.

"Ready! Aim!" whispered the sergeant.

The rifles came up to the shoulders. Gazing over the sights, they saw his grim white face break into a smile. He threw his hand high up in the air with a movement of joy and triumph.

When the crash of the volley, thrown back from the precipice, died away across the meadowland, the officer stepped over toward him. He glanced down at him.

"Dead," he said. He looked at his watch. "Short prayers," he added with a curt laugh. "Thirty seconds. Fall in."



CHOICE

If all delights were mine,
To take or lightly leave,
I would choose first the gift,
To comfort all who grieve;

And next a wide, low house,
With roses on the wall,
Green grass about, good books about,
And good friends within call;

And last, and most, and best—
The joy all joys above—
To spend my days, my strength, my heart,
In serving those I love.

MARTHA McCULLOCH-WILLIAMS.



His Duchess

By Gordon Arthur Smith

Author of "Love Laughs," etc.

THE Xenophon Hotel is on Fifty-blank Street, in that district just west of Sixth Avenue which hesitates between respectability and more or less open sin. The Xenophon is a sort of jumping-off place; anything east of it is pure as the driven snow; anything west of it is eyed by the police. The Xenophon has a rich façade, not wholly inartistic, and its entrance hall and lobby are done in marble. Also, there are columns and pilasters and wrought iron and much gilt; and, as you near the desk, you notice red plush chairs flanked by potted palms or rubber plants. All these features tend, no doubt, to give it that atmosphere of home to which the Xenophon lays claim in its advertisements. I venture to assert, however, that no living man ever possessed a home that in the least degree resembled the Xenophon Hotel.

To the left, as you enter, is the "homelike" dining room, designed to resemble a trellised grape arbor. The wooden trelliswork is genuine, but the grapes are made of glass and serve as lights—a charmingly original thought—and the effect of open air is obtained by painting gold stars on an azure ceiling. All very homelike, you see.

Beyond the elevators—there are two of them—and to the right, is the office, where, from eight p. m. until eight a. m. presides Mr. Graves, the night clerk. All hotel clerks have sane, pronounceable names—names easy for the transient to remember and difficult for the permanent guest to forget. Moreover,

they are always genteel names; no clerk, for example, was ever named Tick or Wigglepate or Bumpus, or, if he was, he changed it when he assumed his clerkship. In this they resemble chorus girls.

Mr. Graves—Mr. Charles H. Graves, to be exact—was no exception. His was a simple, one-syllable, refined name, and his was a simple, one-syllable, refined nature.

He was a blond young man of twenty-six, tall, a little too slim, perhaps, but possessing a figure that appeared to excellent advantage in his cutaway coat. He was good to look at, too, in the manner of the gentlemen who wear the Arrow collars. Had he been a pugilist by profession, he would immediately have been christened "Gentleman Charley," but had he been a pugilist, I fear he would not have lived long to bear the title. By nature, you see, he was pacific. He sought no quarrels—rather he avoided them. He turned the other cheek suavely to the slap direct; not that he was a coward, but because it was natural for him to do everything in his power to keep the peace. And so he made an excellent hotel clerk.

To the Xenophon, one afternoon, with six trunks and innumerable bags and boxes, came a lovely lady. Mr. Graves was not on duty when she arrived, but the day clerk, Mr. Armstrong, reported to him that she was "a regular queen of the May, all dressed up like a plush horse."

"Transient?" demanded Mr. Graves, without great interest.

"No," answered Mr. Armstrong. "All winter, I guess. She's in thirty-three. Bed, parlor, and bath. And there's a maid, too. Had to have her on the same floor, so I put her in thirty-eight."

"I suppose," ventured Mr. Graves, "that she's respectable. What did she register as?"

"She calls herself Madame—— Oh, hell, look at the register yourself. I can't pronounce the stuff."

Together they bent over the big book and read, written in a thin, slanting hand with a multitude of flourishes, the lady's name—Madame Desirée de Beau-rivage.

"Whew!" whistled Mr. Graves. "Some name!"

"Yes," agreed Mr. Armstrong; "some little name. And some little girl, too, to carry it. Hold your breath till you see her. She's eating dinner in her room now."

"Tired after the voyage, I guess," suggested Mr. Graves.

Mr. Armstrong shrugged noncommittally. He had been a hotel clerk longer than Mr. Graves, and he didn't believe that everything with a French name was made in France.

"Voyage?" he echoed. "Well, maybe. And again maybe not—unless p'r'aps from Jersey City."

Once more Mr. Graves, who was a born optimist, consulted the register.

"It says Paris after her name," he announced hopefully.

"Uh-huh. It does. But for all we know, it may be Paris, Texas. Still, I'm not saying she isn't a duchess or something flying from the war zone. She looks the part, all right, and as long as she behaves—well, I guess there's no doubt about her being able to pay her bill. Gawd, you should 'a' seen her clothes! So long. I'm off. Betcha,

if she rings, you take her up the ice water yourself, you rogue!"

With this thrust, Mr. Armstrong took his hat and coat, bade Maisie, the telephone girl, good night, and sauntered calmly out of the Xenophon Hotel.

But he left a strangely stirred Mr. Graves behind him. Mr. Graves, as I have hinted, was at heart a romanticist—one of those romanticists, however, who hide their light under a bushel of affected cynicism and worldly wisdom. If Mr. Graves dreamed dreams and saw visions, no one but Mr. Graves himself was permitted to know of it; which, I think, was a pity. Perhaps the daily contact with the coarse Mr. Armstrong had something to do with this, for the latter would undoubtedly have laughed to scorn any display of sentiment. Mr. Armstrong knew the world and, as he said, knew it to be rotten to the core. Consequently Mr. Graves, who did not know the world, was forced to pretend to bow to his colleague's superior wisdom. But that in no way affected Mr. Graves' inner and secret conviction that the world contained many lovely and lovable people; that true romance flourished somewhere; that somewhere a King Cophetua was wedding a beggar maiden; that somewhere an Aucassin was loving a Nicolette and a Petrarch a Laura; that somewhere a Galahad was seeking the Grail.

Thus the advent of Madame Desirée de Beau-rivage, with six frunks and innumerable bags and boxes, set Mr. Graves a-tremble. A French duchess traveling incognito? Perhaps. At least a countess. Most Frenchwomen were at least countesses. He began to weave romances about her, for business was slack and he had nothing worse to do. Of course her château in the zone had been destroyed or confiscated by the Germans, and she had been forced to flee in the night, desperate, hungry, shivering, with nothing to wear but the clothes on her back. Well—there were

the six trunks. Somehow the six trunks would not fit into the story.

He gave it up temporarily and, urged by a desire for detailed information, turned to Maisie, the telephone girl. Even with Maisie he had to assume an attitude both commonplace and casual, and this he attained by a certain formality of manner.

"By the way, Maisie," he asked as offhandedly as possible, "did you happen to notice this French lady of ours, Madam—er—Madam Desire de Bow-ridge?"

Maisie shifted a plug or two at the switchboard and spun a crank before she answered. Then it was but an echo of his question.

"Did I!" she said.

"I take it from that," ventured Mr. Graves, "that you *did*."

"Am I blind?" retorted Maisie. "She's the swellest thing been in *this* hotel since I been at the board. And six trunks! Gawd!"

Maisie, you see, was neither stiff nor formal. Moreover, she liked Mr. Graves; he was always the gentleman.

"Mr. Armstrong," continued the night clerk cheerily, "seemed to be quite struck with her—er—personal appearance."

"Struck!" echoed Maisie. "Struck! He was tremblin' so he could hardly hand front her key. Mr. Armstrong is sure sensitive to personal appearances."

"Is she—er—young?"

"Young? Uh-huh. She's young. But she ain't *too* young. Her eyes is open, I guess."

"Blond type or brunet?" continued Mr. Graves, selecting a toothpick from the little glass jar on the desk, the better to prove his nonchalance.

Once more Maisie was forced to do mysterious things to the switchboard and to upbraid central before she could answer.

Then: "Brunet. Like mine, some-

thin'. No, I guess a little darker'n me. Yuh seem sort of int'rested, Mr. Graves." This last was delivered very coyly and with a trace of malice.

"Ye-es," admitted the clerk slowly. "We have to know about our guests. It's part of our duty. And somehow this case seems queer—a lady alone with all that baggage and all. You'd think, now, she'd go to the Ritz or some place on the Avenue."

"Perhaps she's hidin' from some one," was Maisie's disquieting suggestion.

Mr. Graves pondered this possibility.

"Some German, perhaps," he said meditatively.

"Perhaps she's a French spy then!" concluded Maisie.

The clerk shook his head, discarding the solution as improbable.

"Not with six trunks. All spies travel light. I wonder, though, who she is."

"Ice water for one-twenty-six," said Maisie. "What's *that* old souse takin' to water for, I'd like to know."

Mr. Graves pressed a button and dispatched a boy with the order. Then for a while he was silent, toothpick gyrating between his lips. It was Maisie who spoke first.

"Why don't yuh get Louis, the coif-foor, to take a look at her. He's French. He might know her."

For some reason this seemed to irritate Mr. Graves, for he said coldly:

"You can be sure that Louis and her are not in the same class. That's one thing you can be sure of, anyhow."

"Take a look, at her yourself, then," snapped Maisie.

"I will," said Mr. Graves grandly, "at the first opportunity."

The opportunity did not come to Mr. Graves until the following evening, for madame remained in her room—and doubtless in her bed—throughout the night clerk's hours of duty. Mr. Graves, however, did not lack companionship. Almost until dawn guests straggled in, disheveled from the cab-

arets—ladies with opera cloaks over their evening gowns, and gentlemen with wilted collars and damaged shirt bosoms; fat, panting old ladies, too, who were probably grandmothers, but who were seeking to dance into the Fountain of Youth, and ruddy-faced old gentlemen who would never voluntarily die in their beds. All of these, pausing at the desk for their keys, exchanged friendly good nights with the affable Mr. Graves before proceeding to the elevators. Some of these, alas, Mr. Graves had to assist to the elevators. But he was "always the gentleman," and never by subsequent word or look indicated that he had been of assistance.

At eight o'clock Mr. Armstrong arrived, fresh and debonair from a good nine hours' sleep.

"Morning, Graves," said he. "How's the duchess?"

Mr. Graves yawned shamelessly. Then, summoning his most cynical manner to cover his real interest, answered:

"I can't say I take much stock in your duchess. Anyhow, the French ambassador hasn't been to call while I've been on duty."

Mr. Armstrong regarded his colleague suspiciously.

"Huh!" he said. "You don't take much stock in her, eh? I guess you haven't seen her, yet—that's why."

"Yep—that's why, I suppose," agreed Mr. Graves.

"Didn't take her up any ice water or anything?"

"She didn't ring or perhaps I might uv."

"She didn't ring, eh? That's sort of suspicious."

At this, recalling Maisie's suggestion, Mr. Graves' face brightened and he displayed an ingenuous excitement.

"It is, isn't it?" he said eagerly. "Perhaps she doesn't want to be seen. Perhaps she's a spy or something."

Having thus aroused Mr. Graves, the

more hardened day clerk allowed his own interest perceptibly to wane.

"Spy—hell!" he said calmly and coarsely. "She's probably got a flask and a thermos bottle in one of those bags, and don't need any ice water."

That was final. Mr. Graves' ardor was immediately dampened.

"Well," he observed, "I guess I'll be going up to bed. Good night."

"Good morning," answered Mr. Armstrong.

II.

Ah, but that evening it was vastly different; that evening Mr. Graves had his innings and scored. In the first place, having given his romantic nature full rein during his sleep, he had dreamed delightfully and poetically of Madame Desirée de Beurivage. That all Mr. Graves' dreams were of necessity day-dreams made them not the less pleasant and vivid. For example, the beautiful Desirée, he dreamed, had come to him as he stood behind his desk in the still watches of the night and had held out white, supplicating arms to him. She was clad in some thin, veil-like stuff that floated about her like a cloud—yes, that was it, like a cloud.

"Protect me!" she had cried. "Hide me! They are pursuing me!"

So he had hidden her behind his desk, and when four German secret agents, flanked by two New York policemen, had endeavored to force their way over the desk, he had repelled them with a volley of ink bottles. Two he had killed outright, and the others had retreated in confusion, cursing vehemently in German. Thereupon, Desirée had knelt before him and said:

"I am the Duchess of Beurivage. Take me, for you have won me."

And he had taken her in his strong arms and kissed her beautiful lips innumerable times and vowed that while he lived she should come to no harm.

A delightful dream, was it not? A

poet could not have dreamed a better one. So vivid was it that it lingered on into his waking hours, and he purposely descended to the office a little late that evening in order to avoid as much as possible Mr. Armstrong's cynicisms. His own mood was too precious to spoil.

Mr. Armstrong was vexed. He had an engagement at eight-fifteen, and yet he greatly desired to tell Mr. Graves all the latest gossip. He was fairly bursting with his news.

"Five of her six trunks have gone," he began without preamble. "She's been out all day long. Just back half an hour ago. No sooner got in her room than she sent for Louis, the coiffeur. 'M sure I don't know what's up. It beats me, all right; it certainly beats me. Keep your eyes open, my boy. There may be something phony going on. I'm off. Late already. Good night.'"

"Good morning," said Mr. Graves serenely.

No, there was nothing phony about Desirée de Beaurivage; Mr. Graves would have staked his life on that. Mysterious, yes, perhaps; but where is your romance without mystery?

"A bottle of Vichy for thirty-three, Mr. Graves," sang out Maisie from the switchboard.

The night clerk started nervously. Thirty-three was *her* room. For an instant he was possessed with the frantic idea of taking up the Vichy himself. To serve her, if it was only with Vichy—that of itself would be a delight.

But his better sense argued against it.

"Front!" he called. "A bottle of Vichy to thirty-three—and hustle it."

Maisie turned in her revolving chair to grin at him.

"Too bad, Mr. Graves," said she. "Yuh ain't even *seen* her yet, have yuh?"

"Who? Oh, thirty-three. No, I

can't say that I have. I guess there's no great hurry about *that*, though."

"Mr. Armstrong had quite a nice little chat with her before she went out this mornin'," declared Maisie pleasantly. "He says she's nice mannered and speaks English almost as good as him. Just a *mite* of an accent, he says—just p'kant."

"Just *what*?"

"P'kant."

"Oh," said Mr. Graves, unenlightened.

"Her trunks went this afternoon," Maisie continued. "Some address just off Fifth Avenoo in the Forties. But she ain't leavin', she told Mr. Armstrong. Seems funny, don't it? P'r'aps she's a smuggler or somethin'."

"Bosh!" exclaimed Mr. Graves. "Smuggler! Nothing of the sort."

And then, of course, he remembered his dream, and the New York policemen who were pursuing her. Still, there had been four German secret agents, too, in the conspiracy against her—and they, surely, would not have bothered themselves about a mere smuggler. No, his first theory had been correct; she was a fugitive of high rank from the war zone.

At about half past eight that evening, Mr. Graves had his first glimpse of Madame de Beaurivage. She came down to dine in the arbor room—and she dined alone.

"You poor lonely thing!" reflected Mr. Graves. "I suppose all your relatives have been butchered in the war, and you are left, unprotected, to face the world."

Mr. Armstrong had not exaggerated her charms in the least. She was a slim, dark woman, perhaps thirty years old. Maisie thought more likely thirty-five, but even Maisie admitted that, if she was thirty-five, she was "well preserved"—no wrinkles and no gray hairs. Her face was small, pointed, and eager. She looked always as if she were about

to speak or to laugh, and when Mr. Graves finally caught a flash of her white teeth, he wondered only that she did not laugh more often.

"Her hair's the best thing she's got," Maisie had volunteered.

Perhaps it was. It was certainly lustrous and dark and plentiful. She wore it parted on the side and drawn down snugly over her ears, and she allowed a straight little bang to hang down in front to her eyebrows. Mr. Graves had the feeling that if her hair were unbound, it would reach to her knees—perhaps farther, for in street-car advertisements he had seen pictures of ladies whose hair almost swept the ground.

Her hair, then, was beautiful, but her eyes were Mr. Graves' undoing. Never before had he seen such eyes; never before, he knew, had eyes been so large and yet so sparkling and so intelligent. No, indeed, there was nothing bovine about her eyes.

When she stepped from the elevator and started toward the desk, Mr. Graves found himself trembling. She was going to speak to him!

"I am Madame de Beurivage, in t'irty-t'ree," she said. "I would very much like it if you could change my room."

Mr. Graves bowed and, calming himself with an effort, inquired if the room was not satisfactory.

She gave a little laugh, and a glint of amusement shot into those eyes of hers.

"Satisfactory?" she echoed. "Oh, but yes. Vairy satisfactory. Only, you see, it is ze numbair zat is not satisfactory."

"I beg pardon?" said Mr. Graves, mystified. "The number?"

"Yes, ze numbair. I cannot say it in Engleesh—'t'irty-t'ree.' In ze shops zey do not understand. So it is annoying. Zey ask me to repeat, and if I repeat, I say it worse each time. *Alors, que voulez-vous?* I must have it changed to

anozzair numbair, like forty-four. You see, I can say 'forty-four' vairy well. Listen, now—forty-four. Is it not so, zat I say it well?"

Again she laughed, looking up at him, waiting for his verdict on her pronounciation. He was so delighted with her and with himself, and with her intimate little phrases and gestures, that he fairly beamed on her.

"Madam can have anything in the house that is vacant," he added, very gallantly, he thought, and with his best bow.

"Ah," she murmured, "you are so nice—vairy obliging. I now can go eat my dinnair with good appetite. *Au revoir, monsieur, et merci.*"

That was all—except that after dinner she flashed him a smile on her way to the elevators and called out:

"Remembair, monsieur, forty-four! I have ze promise."

Yes, she had the promise, and she had Mr. Graves bound hand and foot, her exultingly willing slave. Moreover, she was moved, on the following day, into forty-four, much to the wrath of its former occupants, who were told that there had been some mistake—that they should have been lodged originally in thirty-three.

III.

On many occasions after that first memorable evening, Mr. Graves made opportunities to converse with Desirée de Beurivage. He haunted the vicinity of the elevators at the dinner hour, seldom failing to obtain from her a pleasant word or two. Sometimes, indeed, she stopped to chat with him for several minutes; he had been so "vairy obliging about zat room," you see. Yes, she liked New York; she intended to stay all winter. Mr. Graves expressed his pleasure at this information, assuring her that she was a most welcome guest at the Xenophon, that they—meaning he—would do everything in their power

to make her completely comfortable and at home. He bit his lip over the last phrase. At home! Poor thing, she had no home. And then he ventured to remark that the horrible war had driven many people to America.

Her eyes grew dim at this, and her lips drooped forlornly. He was all sympathy at once. He thought he understood—yes, he assured her, he thought he could guess what she had been through. Moreover, quality and breeding would out, and quality and breeding, he said, were stamped all over her.

"But, monsieur——" she protested.

"No, no," he said vigorously. "I don't ask to know anything, madam. I'm a pretty good guesser, though, and I only want to say that the Xenophon Hotel is honored to have a lady of your rank staying in it."

"Ah," she said musingly. "Ah!"

But from that day forward, as if she knew that he had solved her secret, she carried herself more than ever like a duchess—a duchess who had fled from the war zone—and Mr. Graves exulted in this new bond of silent understanding and sympathy between them.

The time came when Mr. Graves, feeling that their intimacy well-nigh warranted it, took a bold step. He suggested tentatively to Desirée that they lunch together. Lunching, for Mr. Graves, meant, of course, getting up in the middle of his day's sleep, and during his three years of clerkship, he had done this but half a dozen times. Once it had been to attend his grandmother's funeral; once to usher his older brother into the sacred bonds of matrimony; and the other occasions had been during a brief and unsuccessful courtship of a frivolous little blonde whom he had fancied himself in love with. To get out of bed in the middle of the day! It was a sacrifice not lightly to be offered by him at some unworthy shrine. But in his opinion there was no shrine

more wonderful than Desirée de Beau-rivage.

He half expected that she would refuse, so his delight was all the greater when, after a moment's hesitation, she said:

"Lunch? Zat is vairy kind of you, Mr. Graves. But is it quite *convenable*? Not yet do I know ze customs of your country."

Palpitating, he assured her that there was nothing so correct as a little luncheon—especially in one of the better restaurants, and, with the bit in his teeth, he suggested the Knickerbocker. She acquiesced pleasantly, promising to meet him at one o'clock.

Mr. Graves slept but little during the early hours of that day. At eleven o'clock he rose and commenced an elaborate toilet. He donned, for instance, a lavender silk shirt which he reserved for great occasions, and a purple tie that carried out the color scheme very effectively. Also he doused his already glossy hair with a dark-red tonic. And he was very careful about his nails.

He was at the Knickerbocker ten minutes before the hour; so he went to the bar and drank a cocktail, thinking that it would increase his conversational abilities and render him more at ease.

At one-ten Madame de Beau-rivage, dressed quietly and unobtrusively in a black tailor suit and a small black hat with a sort of white spike in the front of it, met him in the lobby.

"Am I late?" she inquired. "Yes? No? Good! I should not desire to be late to our first luncheon togezzair."

That was nice of her—that phrase "*first luncheon*;" it seemed to promise that there would be other luncheons.

In the restaurant Mr. Graves noted that she ordered carefully and economically, and yet without seeming openly to consult the prices. That, too, was nice of her—and tactful.

Then she began to talk.

"It is so good not to be alone," she

said. "I am a stranger in your big country and I feel often lost. I have made not many friends. Zat is hard, is it not? Especially for a woman."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Graves sympathetically. "That must be very hard. But you have made one friend, anyhow. You can be sure of that."

She was silent an instant, reflecting. Then:

"You mean yourself?" she inquired.

"I sure *do!*" he answered with emphasis.

"Now zat is kind of you—vairy kind. And it—how you say it?—it touches me much. I am sure you will be a vairy good friend."

The spoon that bore Mr. Graves' grapefruit to his mouth trembled on its course. Why should he stop at professions of friendship? Why not declare his great passion frankly, and risk all at one throw? He had nothing to lose and perhaps—perhaps—! Somewhere he had read that an honorable proposal of marriage is the greatest compliment a man can pay a woman. By Heaven, then, he would pay her that compliment!

He turned very white. He abandoned all attempt to handle the grapefruit. He pulled nervously at his collar.

"If I had my way," he blurted out, "I'd like to be more than a friend. There, I've spilled the beans, I suppose."

Her eyes widened; she regarded him with amazement and curiosity. Immediately he assumed for her a new interest.

"What you mean?" she murmured at length, with a half smile. "What you mean—spill ze beans?"

"I mean," he explained desperately, "I mean that probably I've gone and offended you. You see, I know I'm not in—in your station. I'm just a clerk with a little low salary and—and all; and you're a lady of rank, even if you have lost everything and are alone. So

I suppose you're awfully sore at my presuming to—to——"

"Yes?" she encouraged him.

"To tell you that I'm in love with you."

She seemed puzzled. She considered his words with wrinkled brows.

"But," said she, "it is not offensive to tell me zat you love me. I like to be told zat. In France one says zat and no one becomes angry. Is it wrong to say zat in America?"

He floundered about, tangled up in the confusion he had created.

"No, of course not. I didn't mean it just that way. I meant—well—I meant that you being a countess or a duchess, probably, or something, and I being just a clerk——"

"Oh," she interrupted, "oh, I see! Yes, yes, of course."

Again she meditated; and as she meditated, a slow flush rose into her face—a flush that paled the touch of rouge on her cheeks.

"And so," she said, dallying with her spoon, "and so you say zat you love me."

"I do love you, and I'd give anything in the world to—to marry you."

"How you know I am not already married?"

He gasped. Strangely enough the possibility had not occurred to him.

"I never thought of that," he faltered.

"You t'ought, zen, I was countess or duchess in my own right?"

"I didn't think," he confessed.

"Zat's good," she said consolingly. "Always it is foolish to t'ink. But nevair mind—I am not married. I am—what you call it?—I am virgin."

"Er—er—we don't exactly say that," he explained; and, blushing, he pictured to himself Mr. Armstrong's coarse laughter at such an ingenuous slip.

"No? Well, you understand."

"Oh, yes—of course. Then—then

there is some chance for me? You'd be willing to think of it?"

"Who knows? Zere is always some chance. Now we will talk about amusing zings—not? We will talk nonsense and be vairy gay."

"You betcha!" answered Mr. Graves with deep feeling.

IV.

Unlike Mr. Graves, Mr. Armstrong, the day clerk, made little progress in intimacy with Desirée; and this he explained by the fact that she was seldom in the hotel during the hours when he was on duty.

Mr. Armstrong was inclined to grumble at this.

"Ladies of real rank," said he brutally, "generally sleep all day and stay out all night. There's something fishy about it when it's the other way round. And besides, where did all her trunks go to, I'd like to know. Where, eh? Before long I'm going on a sleuthing expedition to that address she sent 'em to. Then p'r'aps we'll find out something interesting."

But Mr. Armstrong's services as a sleuth were never needed, for before he found a free night on which to operate, there occurred a distressing event at the Hotel Xenophon.

It was eight o'clock in the evening, and Mr. Graves had just come on duty at the time.

"What's the news, Maisie?" he asked, as he often did at the opening of his session behind the desk.

"Oh, nothin' much," answered Maisie. "One-twenty-six just come in pickled again. Gone to bed, I guess. Twenty-eight wants the radiator to stop poundin', but she'll haveta take it out in wantin'. The Stubbins' kid's got the croup in eighty-two, and both eighty and eighty-four are kickin' like steers. That's 'all, I guess. Hello! Yes, ma'am. . . . All, right, ma'am.

8

There y'are, Mr. Graves. Vichy again for number forty-four, and please send up Louis, the coiffour, if he ain't gone home yet. The duchess must be goin' out on a spree t'-night."

It grated harshly on Mr. Graves to have Maisie refer so familiarly to his goddess, but he dared not betray his irritation. After all, Maisie only guessed that Desirée was a duchess; he *knew*. At least he knew that she was a "lady of high rank."

"Front," he called, "send Louis, the coiffour, up to forty-four, and then take up a bottle of Vichy."

"Yessir," replied front, monosyllabically.

There followed an interval of silence, for Maisie was busy at the switchboard, and Mr. Graves was busy with his thoughts. As I have indicated, Mr. Graves' thoughts always leaped far ahead of his words. Poor Mr. Graves—a bottle of sparkling romance, corked and sealed and perhaps never to be opened!

His meditations were interrupted by the hesitating, shuffling approach of the boy who had been intrusted with the Vichy for forty-four.

"What is it, Robert?" demanded Mr. Graves.

Robert shook his head gloomily, as if the riddle of the universe had baffled him. Robert was a very conscientious, high-minded boy.

"What is it?" repeated Mr. Graves sharply.

"It's all wrong, Mr. Graves," vouchsafed Robert at length. "It's all wrong."

"What's wrong? Go ahead—out with it!"

Robert glanced nervously about the lobby.

"I gotta speak to yuh in private, Mr. Graves," he said.

The clerk admitted him to the office sanctum through a little swinging door beyond the cashier's desk.

"Now, now—go ahead," he commanded.

"I dunno," said Robert, "as I oughta."

The clerk, becoming impatient, became also alarmed. Had not the boy but just now descended from forty-four—from *her* room?

"Well, Robert," he said nervously, "you should know by this time that it is the policy of the hotel to encourage coöperation among its employees. It is in this way that the best service can be obtained." He was quoting from a prospectus recently issued by the management. "We aim to develop a staff that shall pull as a unit, not as individuals, and, that our aim may be obtained, we urge every member of our force to work in harmony with his fellows."

"Uh-huh," answered Robert, who had heard this before.

"And so," continued Mr. Graves, "if there is anything to report—if there is anything wrong——"

"It's *all* wrong, Mr. Graves, I tell yuh it's *all* wrong."

"Well?" queried Mr. Graves persuasively.

"It's forty-four," said Robert reluctantly. "I sent Louis, the coiffour, up to forty-four, 'n' then I went right up with the Vichy—right after. I knocked on the door, but the door wasn't tight shut, so I started to open it. 'N' then I seen——"

"Well?"

"'N' then I seen her—the one in forty-four—'n' I seen Louis, the coiffour—'n' she was kissin' Louis, the coiffour. Honest to God, Mr. Graves, she was *kissin'* Louis, the coiffour—arms around his neck and everything!"

The blow had fallen, and Mr. Graves felt the world totter under his feet. He went very pale and then very red.

"Wha—what did you do?" he stammered.

"Why, I shut the door 'n' knocked

all over again, 'n' she let me in, 'n' I left the Vichy, 'n' then I come right down, 'n' I thought I oughta let yuh know, Mr. Graves. I thought it was my duty 'n' everything."

"Yes," murmured Mr. Graves. "Yes, you did quite right, Robert. Such things should be reported at once. Just the same, I wouldn't say anything about it to any one else until I have time to investigate."

"All right, sir. I just done my duty the way I seen it."

A high-minded, conscientious boy, Robert was, as I have said. Fortunate, indeed, that it had not been Billy or Patrick who had taken the Vichy to forty-four.

Mr. Graves spent the next half hour in something akin to meditation and prayer. At the end of that time he had decided that the situation must be faced squarely. He, too, knew his duty, and he did not purpose to side-step it.

"Maisie," said he, "get me forty-four on the phone and tell her Mr. Graves would like to speak to her if she can see him."

"Why, Mr. Graves, yuh certainly are——"

"Never mind, Maisie," interrupted the clerk severely. "We'll have no remarks, if you please."

"My mistake," answered Maisie, and then, with an affected and significant cough, she rang up forty-four.

"The lady says to come right up," she announced after an interval.

Mr. Graves drew a long breath, cast a glance at a little mirror on the wall beside him, straightened his tie, pulled down his waistcoat, and passed a nervous hand over his perfectly smooth hair. Then he stepped to the elevator.

"Enter," commanded the voice of forty-four in answer to his knock.

He entered.

Desirée was alone in the room, Louis, the coiffeur, having apparently accomplished his duties during the interval

between Robert's excited descent and Mr. Graves' tremulous ascent. She was lying at ease on forty-four's green plush sofa, in a rose-colored something or other with white lace on it, and in her lap was a French novel bound in yellow paper.

She extended to Mr. Graves a white, ringless hand, which—for this was serious business—he ignored with a superhuman effort. Instead, he bowed very stiffly. His lack of cordiality must have intrigued her, for she turned to regard him as he stood there awkwardly at the door.

"You are angry wiz me, Mr. Graves?" she inquired.

"I can't tell you, madam, how disappointed I am—and how—how hard it is for me to say what I've got to say."

"Oh? It is so bad as zat? Come, what is it zat I have done? I have broken not ze Commandments?"

"You've broken one of our commandments," answered Mr. Graves miserably.

It was obvious that she did not understand, that she was completely mystified. But this only made Mr. Graves' task the harder. Had the woman, then, absolutely no moral sense? Must he enlighten her on the difference between right and wrong as laid down in the code of an American hotel? Evidently, yes.

"Madam," he said, "it is very seldom, during the three years that I've worked here, that I've had to do anything so disagreeable. But I have a responsibility to the management of this hotel— They trust me to keep it—er—decent."

"I am sure zey are quite right to trust you, Mr. Graves."

"Eh? Oh, yes. Well——"

"And zen what?"

"Well, I've been given to understand—I've reason to believe—that—that your recent behavior hasn't—well, hasn't been up to our standards."

"My behavior!" she echoed, now visibly distressed. "My behavior! Why you say zat, Mr. Graves? What is it I have done?"

"I'd much rather not speak of it. You ought to know yourself, madam."

"Ah," she cried, "but zat's just it! I do not know! I t'ink you insult me, Mr. Graves. *Mon Dieu, est-ce que tout le monde est devenu fou!*"

"You force me, then, to tell you—very reluctantly, madam."

"Yes, yes, tell me, I pray of you. Put ze dots on ze i's!"

"Very well," said he grimly. "A short while ago the bell boy saw you—saw you—er—embracing, in this very room, Louis, the coiffour. I think there is nothing more to be said. Our hotel cannot wink at such—er—unbecoming conduct. I'm very sorry, madam—very sorry—but I am forced to ask you to leave us."

Enlightened thus as to her crime, she seemed at first to be greatly relieved. Then, on second thoughts, agitation possessed her, and she grew very red. Mr. Graves thought he saw tears in her eyes, but he could not be sure, for his own eyes were strangely dim. His romance was shattered; gone was the fragrance from the rose. He had crushed the blossom under his own brutal heel.

"And now," he added wretchedly, "and now I guess I'd better go and leave you to—to your packing."

"One instant, Mr. Graves," said she. "Give me but one instant. It is zat I can explain, but if I explain, I hurt you, perhaps, even more zan I have already hurt you. And I lose my only good friend in all zis country. You see, it is not facile for me. *Ah, non, je crois bien—ce n'est pas facile du tout.*"

Mr. Graves did not understand her French, but he could not fail to understand that she was greatly distressed. She dabbed nervously at her eyes with her handkerchief, and the clerk subcon-

sciously noted that tears were not unbecoming to her.

"I am quite ready to listen to any explanation, I assure you, madam,"

He had to be stiff and dignified, you see; otherwise he would have fallen on his knees and clasped her in his arms and let her cry on his shoulder. He realized it was one thing or the other.

"Oh, it is hard!" she sobbed. "So hard for me! I have not been fair! I have deceived you—no, rather, I have permitted zat you deceive yourself. For me it was a lovely game—a story—a romance. It please me zat you t'ink I am a great lady. No one evair before t'ink I am a great lady. Even I only t'ink so when I dream, and it was so nice to live ze dream just for one time. Do you not understand, Mr. Graves? Oh, please, Mr. Graves, do not look at me so—so vairy severe and solemn. I have done nozzing but play a little game—a little child game. How you say it—make believe? And you, too, you played it wiz me. And it was so beautiful—so vairy beautiful!"

She hid her face in her hands, but she could not hide from him her tears.

With an effort Mr. Graves stayed by the door, his arms held rigidly at his sides. He guessed now at the disillusion in store for him, but her hideous conduct with Louis, the coiffeur, remained as yet unexplained—and, he thought, inexplicable.

"I infer then, madam," he said, "that you are not a lady of rank. That little deception I can easily forgive. It didn't do any harm, except," he added bitterly, "except perhaps to me."

"I know," she whispered, "I know. I am so sorry! We had to write 'finis' to ze little play. Ze poor duchess had to take off ze fine cloze and ze jewels and ze coronet, and stop ze make believe. No, Mr. Graves, I am not duchess, I am not countess, I am nozzing. I am head *vendeuse*—how you

say it?—I am head saleswoman. I open branch store for my Paris firm. Zat is why I bring all zose trunks full of dresses. You see, I tell you all—all. Zat girl I call my maid is just seamstress. Zey send her over wiz me to help in ze store. Oh, Mr. Graves, I am so unhappy—so unhappy! You t'ink so awfully of me now."

"Not at all, not at all, madam," he assured her uneasily. Still—there was Louis, the coiffeur. What was the nature of her relations to Louis? He put his misgivings into words.

"Oh—Louis?" She laughed a little through her tears. "Zat is so foolish. Louis is my brozzair. Of course I kiss my brozzair. I come t'ree t'ousand miles to kiss my brozzair. You see I have not seen him for now ten years. He come to zis country to get rich, but he remain only a coiffeur. Poor brozzair!"

Mr. Graves was silent for a moment, endeavoring to grasp the new situation. Truly it was staggering to discover that his duchess was the sister of Louis, the coiffeur. And yet—and yet did it not bring her within his reach? Although it is painful to see your goddess fall from her pedestal, surely there is some consolation if she falls into your arms.

"And now," continued Desirée, "now I say adieu, and I begin to pack. You have been vairy kind to me, Mr. Graves. I—I will not forget soon how vairy kind."

"But there isn't any reason why you should leave us now," he faltered. "You have explained everything satisfactorily."

She smiled ruefully.

"Yes, I have explained, but, you see, my friend, I cannot longer be happy here. My make believe is ovair—ze duchess is dead. And I know you despise zat poor little dressmakair zat is left in her place."

"No—no—" began Mr. Graves vehemently, but she interrupted him.

"Do not deny," said she. "Ze glamour is gone. I know."

She began to take her belongings out of the closets and wardrobe, and she piled them listlessly on the bed. And all the time she was crying as quietly as possible. Something told Mr. Graves that now was the time for actions rather than words—that if he did not win her now, he would lose her forever. So he went over to her and took her in his arms.

"Desirée," he whispered, and kissed the tears from her cheeks, "don't you realize that I'm *glad* you are only a little dressmaker? I'm only a little clerk myself, you see."

She held him off at arm's length to look into his eyes.

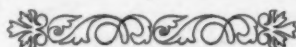
"You mean zat you—you like me just ze same?"

"I mean that I love you more than ever!" he cried.

She sobbed happily on his shoulder.

"You are one wonderful man!" she said.

"We'll be one wonderful pair, then," he concluded, and his heart beat high, for he had made a great discovery. The flimsy, silken fabric of his dreams had been torn to ribbons, but he had discovered a more durable stuff, made of wool and a yard wide. And he knew that romance was not yet dead.



A COMRADE OF THE MORN

JOY runs before the feet of him
Who makes a comrade of the morn,
While yet the woodland aisles are dim,
And dews are opal on the thorn.

Far upward he is led and on
By many golden beckonings,
Hearing the haunting harps of dawn
Breathe raptures from their airy strings.

The meadows weave green sarabands
About him, mile on dancing mile;
The copses wave their leafy hands,
And every blossom has a smile.

An ecstasy his spirit fills,
And exaltation is his mood;
He bares his heart unto the hills,
And triumphs o'er ineptitude.

Rouse, for light floods the heaven's blue brim!
Out, for night's veil aside is torn!
Joy runs before the feet of him
Who makes a comrade of the morn!

CLINTON SCOLLARD.



The Crimson Cross

By C. N. & A. M. Williamson

Authors of "The Lightning Conductor," "The Princess Passes," etc.

I WAS tired and warm and dusty that August afternoon; tired of walking New York streets and toiling up New York stairs, in search of an engagement; and tired of life as well. I'd been spoiled and loved and wanted by everybody I knew for nineteen years, and now, for months that seemed longer than years, nobody had cared, nobody had wanted me.

I had been silly enough to suppose that nothing would be easier for a pretty girl, whose father had been famous, than to pick up a good position on the stage. To be sure, my father, Colonel Trevenor, was dead now, and a political plot had forced him to resign his consulship in Dalvania. I had no near relatives, and hardly any money; but I had been so much admired in Dalvania, and had had so wonderful an experience in the six months I had spent there after leaving my convent boarding school, that New York's neglect was a blow. Of course, more than one engagement had offered, but—on terms I could not accept; and all the right sort of managers seemed to have their companies full for next season.

I was going "home" to my lodgings, after an especially disappointing failure, and taking with me a headache that drugged my senses. My brain was falling asleep as I walked when suddenly it waked with an electrical thrill like the

call of a telephone bell. The curious contour and bright crimson color of the Dalvanian cross had jumped at my eyes.

For half a second I could hardly believe I saw it—there in that New York street so drab in its summer dullness. But it was real; it flamed from the shoulder of a nurse's gray cloak. She had just sprung out of a taxi, and, having hastily paid the driver, she almost ran across the pavement, as if frightened at being late for an appointment. So close in front of me did she pass that I had to step back to avoid a collision; yet, in her preoccupation, the woman did not even turn her head. The long veil of the nurse's bonnet hid her face, and she held it carefully down, despite the wind that let the blazing cross show red under its folds. The door at which she paused to push an electric bell was that of a Turkish bath; and as she was admitted, something stronger than I made me follow. I went in directly after her; but, as I had to stand aside for a couple of women coming out, the nurse had bought her bath ticket and gone on before I could follow.

"Oh, if I can only have the luck to meet her in the hot room!" I said to myself, as I began hastily to fling off my clothes in the cubicle allotted me.

Of course, I knew that the woman would be wrapped in a sheet like every-

body else; but if she were a Dalvanian, I could not mistake the great dark eyes and clear, characteristic features of the handsomest race I'd ever seen. I would summon up courage to speak. I would say in her own language:

"I'm Colonel Trevenor's daughter, Helen. You remember he was American consul to Dalvania."

If she were a Dalvanian woman, she would remember, too, that Prince Paul, the king's younger brother, had fallen in love with Helen Trevenor, that Helen Trevenor had fallen in love with him, and that the "affair" had stirred up political enmity against the consul. But, after all, what if she *did* know the story? I had done no harm; neither had Prince Paul. He had offered to give up his chance of inheriting the crown—a remote one, because the king was young and lately married; still, a chance—and I was confident that only the rebellion raised by their cousin of the bar sinister, Ferdinand the Pretender, had kept Paul from following my father and me to America.

Now, all was changed, and he and I might never meet again. His country was in confusion. Mirko, the king, had been assassinated by his own officers of the palace guard. Queen Gisela had vanished, and no one knew whether her disappearance meant escape or murder. Ferdinand had usurped the throne for the moment, and Prince Paul—when last I had heard of him—had been fighting in the legitimist forces against Ferdinand's rabble army. We had lost sight of each other, and as I could never remind a royal prince of my humble existence, whichever way his tide of fortune turned, the episode seemed closed.

Nevertheless, there would be no harm in talking about dear Dalvania to a Dalvanian woman, and she, too, might like to speak with one who loved her troubled country as I loved it. I almost prayed to find in the hot room

the nurse who had worn that long, slender crimson cross. My heart sank a little, therefore, when I trailed in, classically sheeted, to find only two plump little persons who contrasted with, rather than resembled, the tall-cloaked figure.

"She'll come soon," I consoled myself. "She must."

But the minutes passed and she did not come. This seemed strange, but there was no one I could question. I had to go through the various phases of the bath, as if I had spent my money solely for its luxury. I called myself an idiot, and could have cried, when all hope was over. But there was nothing to do except go back to my cubicle.

Tears blurred my eyes; and so, when I glimpsed a heap of gray things on a chair that should have been draped with my pink poplin, I had to wink salt water away before I could be sure of the change. Then I believed that fate had befriended me and sent me to the wrong dressing room—*hers!* I glanced quickly at the couch, expecting to see a shrouded figure stretched there. But the narrow sofa had no occupant. Above it my own pink petticoat dangled from a hook, and on the floor reposed, just where I had left them, my white-and-black shoes, with a white silk stocking folded inside each.

Here was a mystery! Dazed by its queerness, and half believing that I dreamed, I picked up the gray cloak and examined the crimson cross on the left shoulder. Undoubtedly it was the cross of Dalvania. There was no other on any flag or national insignia at all like that slim, exaggerated shape. Now that I looked at it closely, I saw that it was made of velvet, and sewn rather roughly onto the gray cloth with a kind of buttonhole stitch. Underneath the cloak, which had been flung over the chair back, lay a plain gray dress to match; and on a little table behind the

door, I saw the nurse's bonnet with its long, thick veil.

Could the woman I had hoped to meet be a common thief, who had taken a fancy to my pretty frock and hat—relics of prosperous days—and calmly left me her clothes instead? The idea seemed absurd. But the obvious thing to do was to ring for an attendant and have the puzzle solved.

In a few minutes I had the whole place buzzing. Nobody could provide a better explanation than kleptomania or insanity. In any case, the owner of the gray costume was gone, and as mine had gone with her, I could choose between sallying forth clad as a nurse and remaining to have the police summoned in answer to a complaint.

The latter suggestion, from the superintendent, I refused—to her relief. Better, I felt, to sacrifice a dress and hat than to figure in the police courts. I could see the newspaper headings, and shuddered at the thought! Besides, there was romance in possessing a cloak with the Dalvanian cross, which made up to me for much. I was still in a dream as I walked out with the emblem of Paul's country on my shoulder.

Scarcely had the door closed—no doubt eyes within were still watching—when a man strode toward me from the opposite side of the street.

"Not so smart as you thought you were, Miss Norman!" he chuckled, triumph in a voice as common as his face. "You were followed and seen to go in at the Hammam. Then I knew 'twas O. K. You couldn't make no get-away. So I hung on. Didn't care to stir up a hornets' nest inside."

"My name isn't Norman," I ventured.

The man laughed.

"Tell that to the marines! Do you think stitchin' a bit of red velvet onto your cloak makes a disguise? Now I wouldn't throw a fit if I was you!"

And he showed a police badge inside the breast of his ginger-brown coat.

I thought very hard and very fast for a few seconds. Part of the mystery had cleared itself up. I saw why the nurse had taken a fancy to my things. What the woman named Norman had done was unguessable, but evidently stealing other people's clothes wasn't her first offense. Arguing with or questioning a "plain-clothes" man whose face was as sympathetic as a rat trap would lead only to worse trouble, I argued. If I couldn't somehow escape—and the hope was slight—the best alternative was to go with him—wherever he intended me to go. There, he would not be the only man to deal with. There would surely be some one just enough and reasonable enough to listen to my story. But, oh, how hateful was that alternative!

As I walked beside my captor, and listened to his chat of a taxi round the corner, I gazed wistfully at a beautiful limousine drawn up at the pavement a few yards ahead. It was ready to start, the motor gently throbbing, the liveried chauffeur with his hand on the wheel, the footman holding open the door for some lucky child of fortune.

"Oh, to fling myself in and bang the door shut in this brute's face!" I was thinking, when I caught the footman's eye.

Immediately he made me a sign to get into the car; and as my glance flashed to the chauffeur, I saw that he desired the same thing.

If there had been time to reflect, perhaps I should have feared to jump out of the frying pan into the fire. But the idea darted through my head that these men had come to rescue the woman they thought I was; that they had arrived too late, or she had not dared risk reaching them. Something awful might happen to me if I trusted to their protection; but they had honest, even stupid faces, and there wasn't breathing

space to shilly-shally. With bounding heart and blood, I lurched against the plain-clothes man, so suddenly and surprisingly that he staggered, and—the big footman did the rest.

Almost before I knew what had happened, I had fallen onto the cushions of the limousine, the door had been slammed, the footman had sprung up beside the chauffeur, and we were off with a leap. I had just time to see a ginger-brown form, hatless, pick itself up and bounce round the corner—no doubt to the taxi I'd been told of. Then we had flashed round another corner. Whether after that the detective who wanted "Miss Norman" got upon our track, I could not be sure. There was a pane of glass in the back of the limousine, and now and again, from behind a thin silk blind, I peeped out cautiously. There were taxis in plenty in our wake, but if one in particular chased us, I could not single it out. At last we sped away from the crowd of motors and vehicles of every sort, and having passed beyond Riverside Drive, had the road more or less to ourselves. Then I ventured to let down one of the front windows; also, to ask the footman why I had been taken into the car, and what was our destination.

The chauffeur stolidly drove on, without turning, but the footman answered with a reassuring air of respect.

"We are obeying our master's orders, madam," he explained, speaking with an odd foreign accent. "We were directed to wait in the street where you found us, till a lady should come along, a lady dressed like a nurse with a Dalmanian cross on one shoulder. We were afraid of being late, for we got to the place about ten minutes after the time our master told us. That was because we had a *panne*. It was bad luck, madam! We were uneasy at not seeing you. It must have been nearly an hour we waited. Then we caught sight of you leaving the Turkish bath, and

the chauffeur started the motor, to be ready in case of trouble. Our master had warned us at the last moment that—there might be a difficulty. In a few minutes now, we shall be at the house."

"Who is your master?" I persisted.

"If you don't know, madam, it is for him to tell you," the servant discreetly replied.

Still I was not silenced. "And the mistress?" I suggested. "Is she, too, at the house?"

"Oh, yes, the lady is there," I was reassured promptly. "It is for her, no doubt, you are needed, madam."

The man's air of finality relieved me. And there was nothing, now, to do, except follow the strange adventure of the crimson cross to the end. Luckily, twilight was still far ahead. I felt strong and courageous and curiously eager; not in the least afraid. Could I be a coward with *Paul's cross* on my shoulder?

While I asked myself this, the car shot through an open gateway and drove up to one of those old tree-shaded colonial houses that modern days find stranded among sordid hovels, quarries, and neglected vacant lots. As we turned in, I noticed a half-torn-away placard: "For Sale or to Let Furnished," which gave me an idea that the place had not been lived in long by its present tenants.

Before we had climbed the short hill that led from the gate to the house, the front door was opened by a servant in the same plain blue-gray livery worn by the men in the car.

"His excellency is expecting madam," the man announced in broken English, and the door was closed so quickly after me that the floating gray cloak just escaped being shut in.

The square, old-fashioned hall was dim, and coming into it from outside, I could distinguish nothing until a door to the right was flung open. Then I saw some heavily respectable hall fur-

niture and the figure of a tall man silhouetted against the light.

"At last!" he exclaimed, and he also had a foreign accent.

That of the servants I could not make out; but even before I was in the room, looking up through my—or, rather, another woman's—veil, at his face, I knew that "his excellency" was a Dalvanian. I stared wide-eyed through the thick gauze, wondering if I had ever seen him in his own country. I was sure I had not. Yet his hawk features seemed vaguely familiar, and they ought not to have been easily forgotten.

Suddenly something in my brain that groped found what it wanted. No, I had never seen this man, but I had seen his picture. Surely, surely I couldn't be mistaken! He was Count Arno, who had been prime minister to King Mirko, and who had retired owing to differences of opinion—"ill health," the newspapers had said—just before my father had sent for me to join him in Dalvania. His photographs had been in many shops in Dalzarte, the capital, where I had lived for six months. Count Arno was supposed to cherish fierce resentment against Mirko, but to adore Prince Paul, whose godfather he was.

Through my quick-moving thoughts, I heard him say that he had been anxious, fearing an "accident," and he emphasized that word.

"Since seeing the morning paper, which comes to us late here," he went on, "I had feared intensely that—we might lose our eagerly awaited nurse."

It dawned on me that they *had* lost her and that I ought to break the news at once. I really meant to do so, but instead I heard myself inquiring:

"What did you see, sir, in the morning paper?"

He went to a table scattered with books and journals—mostly foreign—and picked up a newspaper. On the front page he pointed to a column with

a heading so big that I did not need to lift my veil: "Nurse Gertrude Norman Wanted on Suspicion in the Brinsley Heiress Poisoning Case."

"Of course you are innocent," commented his excellency, with what sounded to my ears like subtle sarcasm. "That goes without saying! But—'*wanted*' may be such an awkward word, when there is another position to be taken in a hurry. Now, let me make sure without wasting another moment—since, indeed, there is no time to waste. My secretary, Karndorff, explained to you at the agency last night what your duties would be?"

"Karndorff?" I stammered.

"Yes, that is the name—by which he was to introduce himself. Unfortunately I have not seen him since. He is away on business till to-morrow. Did he tell you that?"

"No, he didn't tell me," I stammered.

I realized that I was involving myself more deeply every moment, and yet—I *must* know now what was the business for which Gertrude Norman was needed. What if, somehow, it should concern Prince Paul, this old mountain eagle's godson?

"There was so little time to arrange matters," his excellency sighed. "I see now that you—er—must have had what has actually happened in mind when you asked for an appointment *in the street*. Have no fear. We shall be able to protect you in your trouble. And it shows me—this thing—that Karndorff has been well recommended to you for our case. He telegraphed me—we have no telephone here—that he judged, from your face and manner, as well as circumstances, that you were the person he wanted. No woman in America more suitable."

I was thankful that Karndorff couldn't be back till to-morrow, whether or no his excellency intended to pay Gertrude Norman a compliment.

"The nurse we got in for the child's

birth left this morning." Count Arno's words were punctuated with my heartbeats. "We never intended to keep her on. Some excuse would have been made to send her away. But, as it turned out, old Katucha thought her a fool. That settled matters easily for us! Katucha was nurse to the lady whose baby was born here yesterday. Katucha is a dangerous woman—of the tigress breed. But she is prepared to think well of you. It is important to win her trust; otherwise she will refuse to let the baby sleep with you to-night."

"It is to sleep with me?" I echoed.

"Yes, it is to sleep with you, in your room adjoining the mother's. *It must sleep well. You understand?*"

My lips were cold as I answered:

"I think—I understand."

"The child is so young!" the old man went on, half to himself, it seemed. "Twenty-four hours of life! And he is weak and small. He hardly exists. Ten to one he would cease to breathe before the week is out, even if—but the end *must* come before to-morrow. I will tell you this! It is for the good of a nation that his life should be snuffed out. There can be no suspicion against you, madam. Such young babies must often quietly pass away in the night, while their nurses sleep. Is it not so? A hand laid for a few seconds over the mouth and—pouf!—the end of what has scarcely begun."

"You are safe here, because the doctor—a naturalized American—is a man from my own country, and loyal at heart to its best interests. I know what he will certify. But a nurse it was necessary to have. You will take another name. I shall introduce you as 'Miss Brown' to Katucha, and so you will be known to Katucha's mistress. I think anything you may learn in this house, as to identities, you will find it well for your own interest, as for ours, to keep to yourself. And by the way, better, perhaps, that I see your face."

It was an ice-bound instant. If Karndorff had described Miss Norman, or if the woman's photograph should appear in an evening newspaper, I did not think that Helen Trevenor would ever leave this highly respectable colonial house, "let furnished." Yet hesitation would be fatal. I threw up my veil and looked the old man in the face. His eyes lit, but not with anger, and his only comment was:

"I expected to see a much older woman."

"Some people say I seem younger than I am," I admitted.

This was true. I was twenty, and had often been taken for eighteen.

"Well, I trust to the character you have already shown," he said. "Show it again—to-night, and earn the other half of this."

He took from an inner pocket of his coat an envelope, and handed it courteously to me. It was sealed, but had no address. As I took it, not knowing what else to do, he touched an electric button and brought to the door the servant who had let me in.

"Show the nurse to Madam Katucha."

The order was rapped out in Dalmatian; and the once familiar language, honey-sweet on some lips, was singularly harsh on these.

At the top of the stairs a brown old woman awaited me. The eyes that searched my face were fierce as a caged animal's, but they were even more appealing. They tried to read my soul.

"Can you speak French?" she inquired. "I have not much English. It is lucky that you can," when I nodded. "You are young—and your face is as an angel's. But how can I be sure it does not hide the heart of a cat?"

"Trust me, Madam Katucha," I said, and held out my hand.

She took it, and I pressed the hard old fingers. Still clasping mine, she led me into a room. And there, lying in an

old four-poster bed, I saw Queen Gisela of Dalvania.

My blood rushed up to my head; and yet, when I could think, I told myself that I was not surprised. I ought to have known—subconsciously I had known—when Count Arno spoke stammeringly of a “lady” whose boy baby had been born in the old New York house, that he was speaking of his queen—and of her son, the king. I ought to have known, too, in knowing this, what Miss Norman’s business was, and why a woman suspected of murder was precisely the person needed. Count Arno wanted the baby to die, because, with him dead and his mother a widow, Prince Paul would have the throne when Ferdinand’s reign was broken.

That was what Gertrude Norman had been engaged to do. She, who had never seen Prince Paul of Dalvania, was to have made his way clear to the throne. I, who loved him, must block it.

All I had to do, now that I saw the whole situation, was to go back presently to Count Arno, return his envelope unopened, and say that on second thoughts I had changed my mind. Perhaps, being the man he was—ready to run all risks or to take none—I should pay with my life for not earning the other payment. But that was a detail. If I refused to do the work Arno wanted done, somebody else would do it; and one day before long Prince Paul would be king.

There was that to think of, and to prevent his reaching the throne would be a selfish act, if it were to be committed in any way but this. For who could tell, after all, whether Paul *might* not find me again, and ask me to marry him, if the crown were on another’s head than his? But I didn’t mean to refuse and hand the work over to less scrupulous hands. I meant to save the baby if I could. And after the first rush of realization, I hardly thought of

Paul. I thought of the piteous queen mother and her one-day-old child.

Queen Gisela didn’t recognize me, though only a year ago I had been presented at court to her and King Mirko, among forty or fifty *débutantes*. She had seen me at a ball and a palace garden party or two afterward; but there was no room in her thoughts now for memories of irrelevant girl faces. Her whole being was concentrated in anxiety for her child. Count Arno was no doubt playing the friend and protector, and she had to trust him because, in the midst of many plots, she had no one else to trust. But she was afraid. Perhaps Katucha, more suspicious and sophisticated than she, had put fear into her heart.

“Shut the door, Katucha,” she half whispered. “I want to talk to the new nurse.”

I bent over the bed, and the queen turned down the coverlet to show me a small ivory face in the crook of her arm.

“Who could hurt such a little angel?” she appealed to me. “Surely not you? You are young, younger even than I am.”

“No one shall hurt him,” I said, and let my eyes meet hers.

“What do you mean? What do you know?” she faltered.

And Katucha drew close.

“Speak out,” the old woman urged me. “Don’t be afraid she’ll faint. You’re at the bedside of a queen, and royal women have strength to bear what they must bear. The black monster wants the baby king killed?”

The queen’s thin hand pulled me down on the bed. It would have been foolish to keep back what I knew, and I told the whole story.

“We couldn’t prove this, if we tried,” said Gisela. “*He* is too clever. You have nothing in writing?”

“Not a word,” I answered.

“It is just as well. We don’t want

to *prove* things. We want only to save the child. Did Arno make a time limit? Is it for to-night?"

I bowed my head.

'Ah, that means that my brother-in-law, Prince Paul, must be due to arrive to-morrow! Arno said he was coming—that he'd been wounded and was out of the fight—that he wished to see me, for Mirko's sake. But I didn't dare believe it. It seemed too good to be true. Paul would not grudge my baby his life! I believe he'd die to defend it. He doesn't want to be king. He fell in love with a girl, an American. But Arno would do anything to put him on the throne. And if my little Mirko were dead, Paul would have to reign when they called him home. Dear nurse, I trust you. How can you save my baby?"

"I can't tell yet, but I *will* do it," I said. "When I see the room where we are to sleep, maybe I shall know better."

I felt suddenly happy and resourceful and even brave, because Gisela had spoken of the American girl Paul loved. I was going out of the house—if I could!—before he came into it, but—the same city would hold us both.

When I realized that the window of my room must be directly above the window of the library where I had talked with Count Arno, I knew that my task would be difficult—far more so than the one he had set me. And to make it worse, there were squeaky boards in the floor.

"I'll wait till toward dawn," I thought, "the dark hour before day. He'll be in his bed and asleep then, surely."

But he was not. Looking through my curtains, I could see a light streaming out from his window onto the grass. He was always there. Was he waiting for something? If so, for what? Did he hope to hear a cry in the night, and to have the nurse come running down

in a panic to tell him the baby was dead?

I thought that might be the expectation, and so did the queen and Katucha. But at two o'clock, a taxi drove into the gateway and up to the house. Soon after it had gone, I heard the rumble of men's voices in the library.

"Who has come?" I wondered. "Can it be Prince Paul, sooner than expected? Will Count Arno risk telling him that the baby has died?"

"Shall we wait and see what happens?" I whispered to Katucha, who tiptoed to the door ajar between the two rooms.

"No, no," she said. "It would be too dangerous. That may be the count's secretary. If they should come up! Oh, go, go quickly, while they are talking and will not notice if you make a noise."

There was no hope of escaping from my window, while that light gleamed in the occupied room below; but the queen's room faced the front of the house, and she sat up in bed, trembling, while Katucha and I knotted my sheets and blankets together and fastened one end of the rope to the heavy, old-fashioned bureau.

Getting over the window sill and letting myself down to the ground wasn't much more difficult than descending one of the tall trees I'd loved to climb in the convent garden. While I stood below, Katucha pulled up the sheets and, tying on the baby's basket, lowered it carefully to me. He had had a drop of some old-fashioned Dalvanian soothing sirup, and slept without waking. I did not wait to see what they did afterward with the sheets. I fled fleet-footed, with the baby under Miss Norman's cloak, thankful when I had got beyond the gate without meeting a spying gardener or barking watchdog. But though I did not see, I knew what they meant to do, that pair of innocent plotters I had left behind. They would

draw up the telltale rope of sheets and blankets, attach it to some piece of furniture in my room, open my window wide, let down the rope part way, and then—after I had been given a good start—Katucha would wake the household with a wild alarm. She would cry out that the new nurse had stolen the baby; and if it were Prince Paul who had come, she would accuse Arno of a plot to get rid of the little king for his sake. If it were "Karndorff"—that would not be worth while. But, at worst, the baby would be saved, and the queen had no fear for herself.

We had had little time to plan what I was to do with the child, if I escaped. To shield Gisela and her old nurse from suspicion, I took with me Arno's envelope. (He might think Gertrude Norman meant to blackmail him, if he liked! I hoped he would—and suffer tortures.) But I did not intend to use the blood money. The queen had given me her purse, and the scheme we had hastily concocted was that I should make for my own lodgings. I gave the address—not on paper, but to "keep in their heads"—and though I could not communicate with them, sooner or later they would reach me.

There was no dog and no night watchman. Count Arno had counted upon Gertrude Norman's willingness to earn the remaining half of her reward. If I had dared, I would have peeped into the library window to see whether Paul or Karndorff was there. But I had the baby to think of, and could afford to run no unnecessary risks.

I slipped away, along the grass and out at the gate, stealthy and silent as some small creature of the night who fears a thousand enemies. In the open road, I felt safe—or comparatively safe—from Arno, for Katucha would be slow about giving the alarm. But there were other dangers. I thought of dreadful tales we read in newspapers, and wondered shudderingly if there

would be one about an unknown young woman and a baby, murdered within the limits of Greater New York, for the public to read with to-morrow morning's coffee.

Nothing happened, however, except that I walked an interminable distance, and the tiny bundle I carried, changing from arm to arm, became as heavy as the Old Man of the Sea—or the burden of Gertrude Norman's conscience. I buoyed myself up through all with the thought that, when seven o'clock came and eating houses opened, I could find a place to rest and be refreshed. I'd plenty of money, and could get some restaurant keeper to telephone for a taxi. Then, with the child—who would have to be carefully explained to my landlady—I could spin comfortably and safely home.

Suddenly, however, as I cheered my weary frame with this prospect, it occurred to me that I had better look at the money. I had opened neither Arno's envelope nor the queen's netted bag. Choosing a street so commonplace that nothing could ever have happened in it by night or day, I set myself to examining the contents of Queen Gisela's purse. It had in it five Dalvanian gold pieces and two notes. I realized instantly that I could not cash them at any restaurant such as I should pass in this district; and even if I could, to do so might put Arno on my track. By this time the search had probably begun, and only by keeping to out-of-the-way streets could I hope not to be caught.

I was compelled to break the envelope containing the first half of Gertrude Norman's reward. No better luck therein! I counted ten one-hundred-dollar bills. She was to have been better paid than Judas Iscariot! But if I offered a hundred dollars for a breakfast, and asked for change, in some small eating place along my way, the proprietor would telephone the police to keep an eye upon me. I didn't want

that to be my fate! And it would be equally hopeless to hail a stray taxi if by some odd chance I saw one at such an hour.

Finally, however, reduced to desperation, and expecting at any instant to see the smart blue limousine of yesterday slow down beside me, I begged a lift from a man with a market cart. It was covered, and offered a hiding place for the gray cloak with its conspicuous red cross, which Katucha and I had forgotten to rip off.

The carter laughed when I confessed that I had no money to give him. He didn't want money for such a job, said he. The pleasure of a lady's society would be payment enough; and the small talk with which I rewarded him was generous in quantity if not quality. I had to walk again after our roads parted; but the distance between me and "home" was not too great. I knew my way, and hurried toward my goal, no longer greatly fearing to be caught by Arno. He did not know where I lived, and therefore I was for him a needle in a haystack.

Thinking thus, I forgot that Count Arno of Dalvania was not the only hunter whose desired prey was Gertrude Norman. I took a short cut to my lodgings, and before I realized the danger I ran, was in the street of the Turkish bath.

"Got you this time, my lady!" rapped out a voice I knew too well; and a hand gripped the shoulder that bore the crimson cross.

I hardly needed to turn my head. I knew without looking that the ginger-clad detective of yesterday had trapped me once more.

"You didn't think I'd find out you lived in this street before you took on

your last job! But I don't fall down on many of my stunts. Hello, taxi! Hi! Police business."

A taxi that had been moving slowly through the street slackened to a crawl, and a young man looked out, as the chauffeur explained that he had a fare. As it happened, the young man was Prince Paul of Dalvania.

I threw up the nurse's veil, and all my soul I put into the appeal for help my eyes gave him. I prayed also that Katucha had told him enough to put him on guard.

"If it's police business, you can bring your prisoner in, officer," he said coolly, with a glance at me that was worth being born for. "I'll drive you where you want to go."

"Thank you, sir. You're a real sport—and this is big game!" grinned the ginger-clad one.

He pushed me into the taxi, and I didn't resist. Then, before the detective could follow, Paul slammed the door and gave the chauffeur a direction. Police or no police, Prince Paul of Dalvania was a man who knew how to make himself obeyed.

"You darling! You heroine!" he said. "I've found you! Nothing shall ever part us again." He tried to seize my hands and kiss them.

"Mind the baby!" I warned him.

Paul laughed out joyously.

"I will mind him! He's my king, and he gives you to me."

The rest goes without telling; except that, the revolution now being ended, Count Arno will live in exile, while Queen Gisela is regent for her son Mirko. And Prince Paul and I are going to spend our honeymoon in a trip around the world.





"THE LINE'S BUSY!"

By Albert Edward Ullman

GEORGE W. ALADDIN, HIMSELF!

DEAR MABEL: I can hardly write because my eyes are still aching from seeing society, but here's all about your little Goldie and the high life. A week ago no one would ever have suspected me of wearing one of them evening gowns what makes you think some one's left the bathroom window open, but now I shiver haughtily every time six o'clock strikes. It all depends on what you're used to, dearie, and, believe me, I'm used to best-company manners and high-toned starvation since little old last Thursday eve. Goodness knows, the only yellow thing about me is my hair, but I wouldn't go through it again, even with a bottle of chloroform.

Well, it all came about through that Mame Smathers—only she spells it "Mayme" now—who used to room with me. I never expected to see her again, because a party who is a quick, glad toucher is always a slow, sad payer; and when she breezed away to go on the stage or something, I kissed both her and part of my savings good-by. I guess it was two years ago that she started out with not much more than a new hat and a slow smile—she always knew the latest things in hats, but never knew when there was a hole in the toe

of her stocking—and I had the surprise of my young life when she discovers yours truly at the switchboard, and falls all over me.

"Oh, you Goldie, you!" she sort of chokes, and before I can say a word, she's dumped a roll of bills in my lap. "I tried to find you at the old place, but they didn't know where you'd moved."

While I knew that wasn't strictly on the level, there was the money, and she seemed right glad to see me. Anyways, I always liked her, 'cause she had a way of losing out as easy as some folks win and still keeping a smile.

"Why, Mame," I says, "you look as grand as a duchess."

And then she laughs and hugs me some more. I guess if she hadn't been dressed so fine, with her hair looking like it had been done up by an upholsterer, people would have thought we were in love with the same man. You know she was always about as serious as a kitten playing with a string, and she's soon bubbling over with the story.

It appears that she met up with a young party who clerked in Wall Street, about a year ago, and her being out of a job and him being the first one she had seen worth tagging in a

long while, she allowed him to buy her a license. At first even the Harlem flat, with three real meals a day, looked good to her, but then, all of a sudden, he made some money out of one of the war stocks you read about, and he kept piling it up until his roll looked like a strip of hall carpet. After that, they buy a small house out on Long Island, and start in keeping house for all their friends and neighbors and pretending to enjoy themselves. Funny, ain't it, Mabel? When you call it "hospitality," it's all right, but if you call it "keepin' boarders," it's all wrong.

Anyhow, Mame ends it all by insisting on me coming out to dinner with her and her hubby; and when I tells her I haven't any evening dress, she says that's all right, 'cause she's going to make me wear one of hers. I couldn't make any more excuses, 'cause it turned out that she was stopping right there in the big hote for a few days, and there was nothing to it but come right up to her rooms after I says the last "hello." When she tells me that with all her new money and new friends, she is just dying to have some one to talk to natural, I gave in.

When I blows up to her suite an hour later, there she is with her maid, and they've got a dress laid out that looks like the blue-and-gold part of a rain-bow.

"You sit right down, dear," she says, "and let Annette do up your hair."

"I dunno," I answers, uncertain.

"Won't this simple way be all right?"

"It's too young, you little goose!" she laughs. "And flappers ain't in style just now."

"All right," I comes back desperate-like. "You're getting up the parade."

Say, girlie, when I first went up, I didn't know what the management might say about me tramping through the lobby with somebody else's evening dress on, but when they got through with me, my own landlady

wouldn't have known me if I was a month back. Why, I looked ten years older, and as if I'd learned a lot without turning sour. After Annette had sprayed some perfume on me, which made me keep my nose in the air to avoid myself the rest of the evening, I certainly looked the real and proud thing.

And then her hubby blows along in a white shirt and a white face, and we sets out in a taxi. It turns out we're aiming for the latest thing in cabarets, what's just opened and charges twice as much as any other. Well, I just sat there listening to Clarence—that's his name—only I couldn't help pulling up my wrap now and then as if it was a blanket. From what he said, you had to get a Mr. Dun or Bradstreet to smuggle you in, and you couldn't do that unless you phoned the day before and almost bought the place. He just raved about the color scheme, and says the decorations are by some party named Poirèt, and all in black. After I got my first look at 'em, all I could figure out was that they were trying to makes the Pittsburgh spenders feel at home.

Though that perfume the maid slapped on me kept my nose up in the air, I could see, as we made our way to the table, that most of the men were either very pale or very red, and that most of the women were wearing even less than I was, and I certainly thought that was as little as the law allowed. Then the head waiter comes up and sings something that sounds like grand opera to Clarence, and Clarence sings something back, and the head waiter pretends to understand him and waltzes away.

After that, Clarence makes a gargling noise at another waiter, and pretty soon he comes back with little cups of something, and Mame and her hubby sups it and roll their eyes with pleasure. Of course, I can figure out it's

some kind of fancy consommé—anything like noogie soup would cause the patrons to choke—and gets away with it. Honest, Mabel, it tasted like something the nurse hands you for nourishment when you're so sick you don't care what happens.

Say, if I live to be as old as a jealous dame says her fellow's other girl is, I'll never forget the dishes that I followed. There wasn't anything I'd ever heard before, much less tasted. The names sounded well enough, but that ain't satisfying when you're real hungry, and what I called 'em to myself didn't sound like the language of flowers. At that I rather think Clarence guessed at most of the stuff, but he sat there with such a proud smile on his face and such a hungry look in his eye that I pretends to be as happy as if the food was fit to eat. I'd been up against something like it before—when our new chef tried to hand us regular guests' food, and the help all threatened to quit—but it was nothing to what I suffered on this occasion.

Just to make matters worse, a lot of them cabaret cuties would circle around us, bawling out the latest song infection and trying to kid up into believing that that was the life. Every time they'd get between us and the electric fan, there'd be a shower of talcum or something, and we'd get a mouthful of eau de violet that the Colgates make for other people. Believe me, girlic, Clarence looked like he'd been toying with a pastry cook after they sashayed around once, and he had 'em turn off the fan.

Things sort of slowed down after a while, and Mame began fretting about her pet Pom, left all alone with only the maid to put it to bed. I realized then there's only two kinds of wedded bliss—with one kind you get a lot of children, and with the other a lot of dogs. Anyways, she keeps getting her temperament up so that she's about as pleasant company as the toothache, and

we start to beat it back to the big hote. I always thought that one mutt was about as good as another, but from what Mame says, I'm all wrong. Now I knows where all them educated fleas you hear about come from. Yours,
GOLDIE.

DEAR MABEL: Have had an awful case of indigestion since my last, but, take it from me, after that dinner party of Mame's, even indigestion is a pleasure when it comes from real eats. Talk about environment and criminology and all that highbrow stuff, I guess what folks eat has a good deal to do with what folks are. Honest food generally goes with honest people, if they can get it without stealing, while all that fancy chuck is for those leading fancy lives. Just take the chappie who has his cigarette and coffee regular in the morning, or the doll who thinks chop suey some Sunday breakfast—you wouldn't name any children after 'em, would you? Tell me what you eat, and I'll tell you what you ain't, I says.

And all them funny cracks, dearie, about home cooking and the pies mother used to make, come from a lot of parties drinking sour grape juice. They sit around joshing their own poor palates, and making believe that all them patent foods and things out of cans are more nourishing than the labels. Plain simps, I calls 'em; and if they ever saw any peas not touched up with Paris green, or preserved peaches without peroxide, they'd think they was spoiled. Of course, they're making pies and cakes, and almost everything from soup to nuts, by machinery now, and all them big packers are raking in money from the by-products faster than a mint can turn it out. Why, they get more from a squeal now than they used to get from a whole hog. Anyhow, there's one thing sure. No machine is ever going to take the place of mother at the cookstove, and the party who

thinks so must have been raised in an incubator.

Say, Mabel, I'd be getting frantic writing about all these things to eat, only I knows there's a dill pickle in the top dresser drawer that will be missing before morning. Mebbe pickles at night are not good for me, but there's no rules for keeping out of trouble in this world—and you don't need any to get in it.

Which reminds me there's a little fluffy stopping at the hotel who looks like she's been eating pickles for the past year. It may not be pickles, but there's something wrong with her, though I guess it's only skin deep. She's all the way from Indiana, and not such a bad looker, only she's a little shy on style. She's been wandering in and out, lonesomelike, for some days now, usually with a flat package under her arm, and looking as if she was just craving for a cheerful word. Well, it wasn't long before I handed her a sunny smile, and she perks up right away and comes over to the switchboard to ask about some art stores. At first I thought she wanted one of them Broadway shops that sell picture post cards, leather moccasins, and the latest song misses, but it turns out that she means them swell places where they keep hand-painted pictures. After that I skipped through the directory and gave her a list a yard long.

Late that afternoon, she slows in, all tired, and handed me a box of candy. While she may not know her way about a big city, when it comes to tracking down the best candy shop, she has a movie Indian backed off the screen. I didn't want to take it at first, because she didn't look any too prosperous, but she insisted and said she never ate it herself. So, you see, I knew it all along. When a girl begins to look down in the mouth, it's generally due to pickles or love! I tells her that, and she kind of flushes up, but before she

can say anything, our star guest hops up and monopolizes my attention and the attention of everybody in the lobby. They say she was an actress once before she married Old Man Stryker and his millions, and she calls for a phone number like that Mr. Hamlet asking for his horse. Honest, girly, when she starts telephoning, everybody can hear but the person at the other end of the wire, and when she whispers, she's about as confidential as a brass band. If she stays here much longer, the management will have to give us ear muffs.

After all, though, she's probably a good soul at the bottom, and is real generous to all the help. She rather likes me, I think, for the first time we met, she said we were the only two real blondes in the hotel. Well, I didn't know whether to laugh or be insulted, so she must have judged from my face that I believed her, and tipped me a dollar. After that I was willing to vote her the only one, and even tell her that her figure didn't lie. To get back to where I started, it must have been a half hour before Mrs. S. gets through talking like a thunderstorm, and while I was sitting there wishing that you could see over a telephone and talk deaf and dumb with your hands, she bounces up and asks the charge. While I'm making change, she spots that box of Paillards.

"Oh!" says she, coylike. "So the young men buy you candy?"

"No such luck," I answers.

"Why?" she asks, surprised. "With your looks, you could have a barrel of chocolates."

"Mebbe," I says, soft. "But I'm not that fond of candy."

She laughs at that and looks real pleased.

"You're all right, little girl," she smiles, "and people who are all right never get left. Here's something to keep you supplied with candy."

From the size of the bill, she must have thought I had a sweet toooth like a whole Winter Garden chorus. Yours,
GOLDIE.

DEAR MABEL: Had some time yesterday—with Mame and her hubby paying the freight—and back so tired that I walked up to my little two-by-four in my sleep. You can just guess it wasn't any highbrow party this time, or I'd got tired before it started. Coney Island was the place we was joy wrecked, and though Clarence thought at first that the best you got there was the worst, I didn't notice him hollering for any help after we got good and started. Long before the lights went out, he was chewing enough hot corn to please the most expensive dentist.

It all came about most unexpected. You see, Mame has been playing the market, as she calls it, without her hubby knowing it, and like most women who do gambling on the side, it was on the wrong side. She had all her pin money for the past year and the year to come wiped out in no time, and was on the point of telling Clarence everything when her stock took a notion to jump up about ten points. Well, that's where I came in, for her broker party phoned to tell her, and she was out. He appeared so anxious, though, that I offered to help him out. It seemed to me that I phoned every place where money screams in New York before I located Mame on the Castor roof. Say, girlie, she must have kept the wire hot after that, for it was no half hour after the broker sold her stock that it dropped back to its old place again. And mebbe Mame wasn't grateful when she romps in to tell me that she's got her money back, and she's through with that speculating game. That's how I came in for the big treat.

To make up the party, they invited an English sea-captain friend of theirs, and we started out in a big touring car,

painted all yellow like a chain of grocery stores. The cap was kind of subdued at first, and he went about with his red chin whiskers sticking out, and blinking like the lights was affecting his eyes. He was a good sort at the bottom, and when Mame and Clarence refused to loop the loop with me, he hitched his trousers, cast a weather eye up, and said he'd see me through. Probably the old slat had been up against some ocean waves, but never anything with a motion like that, for when he escapes, he mumbles something about the sea being the only safe place. I tried to coax him onto some other rides, but he pretended not to hear, and it wasn't until we reached the Bowery that he seemed to wake up. A Bowery, no matter where it is, seems to be a weak point with all them seafaring men.

It was when we were walking along taking in the sights that we first missed him, and it was several minutes before we spotted him throwing balls at a dusky head sticking through a hole in a canvas. Well, I don't think the old boy will be signing with the Giants soon, because the nearest he ever came to hitting the moke was when a ball bounced back from the next building across the lot. Finally, we managed to tear him away, after the balls was all used up and Clarence had slipped the man behind the counter a bill.

"A dashed fine place, you know!" panted the captain. "Every blasted person so fine—so hospitable! A real peoples' playground—what?"

Just then he spies something else to throw balls at, and his nibs gallops up and has an armful before we could cry halt. We just stood there watching him fire balls, and using submarine cuss words every time he missed, until he was out of breath, after which Clarence paid the freight again. It looked to me as if all them ball people had passed the tip to each other, be-

cause, for the next half hour, they were busy lassoing the cap every step we took, and handing him more balls. I guess by that time Mame's hubby had been set back about sixteen dollars, for his guest must have thrown about a million balls at the rate of three throws for a nickel—and he got tired standing in the bleachers so long. Anyways, when the captain discovers another game, why, Clarence just motions us, and we amble on and take in some sights down the line. We were probably a mile away and still moving when we hears an awful commotion and hustles back to see what it's all about. I had a hunch that the old boy might be mixed up in it, and sure enough, there he was in the middle of a crowd, having some argument with the party at the last place he stopped.

"Two dollars and ten cents," the man was saying as we arrived.

"For what?" bellows the cap. "You can't take me in, you dashed shark, you!"

"For a hundred and twenty-six throws," comes back the other orator.

"But I didn't hit anything, you know," protested his nibs, looking astonished. "And you can't charge me for missing, now, can you?"

"Oh, can't I?" says the man, sarcasticlike. "Well, you'll pay up or you'll miss your little bed at home to-night, you old rummy!"

We got wise right away that the cap thought the whole business was free, not seeing Clarence do the paying, and was getting fighting mad, so we sailed in and rescued him. That ended the fun, for the captain got grouchy and took back all he said about Coney's hospitality. To make matters worse, he seemed to be worrying about his arm, which was beginning to ache, as if his first name was Christy, and complains bitterly about always spilling his grog when he uses his left hand.

I was telling Bernice about it to-day

—she's the sad-looking little dame from the Wabash—and she smiled for the first time in two days. From what I can make out, she's going around trying to sell some paintings and not succeeding any too well. She let slip that she'd made a try at that Peter Spencer, who's always helping young artists in the newspapers—patron of art they calls him. I guess that's about the only place he helps them, as long as they need any help, for he wouldn't even see Bernice and her pictures. I wasn't any surprised, for he's the sort of bird who's always talking about making the world better. If he ever had a try at it, everybody would want to lay down and die to get out of it. Yours,

GOLDIE.

DEAR MABEL: When it comes to getting tangled up in other people's business, you gotta hand it to me. I guess my finish is to be fat and forty, with every afflicted party in the neighborhood weeping on my shoulder and using me as a piece of upholstery. At that I'd rather get slopped all over with other people's tears than any of my own. Of course I sometimes wish I could cry myself when I have troubles of my own, but somehow I get thinking, and then they don't seem to be big enough to cry about. Losing your pay envelope, dearie, ain't near as bad as losing your complexion. Why, I've seen parties carry on as much about a burned chop as they would about their house burning down.

Well, this time it's my friend Bernice, but from something that happened, there may be a way out. She just let it slip when she came in all tuckered out yesterday afternoon. She had been to every art dealer in New York, trying to sell some pictures she had painted back home, and all of 'em had turned her down flat. I guess she's up against it for fair, because if she doesn't raise a certain sum by

Saturday, her mother is going to lose the little home they have. I asks her if they haven't any friends who might help, and she says there is one, but that she ain't never begged any money yet and never will. Poor, proud little thing! What could I say to her after that. I only looked wise and insinuated that something might happen.

Say, girlie, you'll probably say I'm some prophet after this. Bernice had hardly more than gone to the elevator when a rather plump man of about thirty, with lemon-colored hair, starts to sidle up to me with a smile. You would have picked him out from his face as the kind of a man you'd like to owe money to, so I didn't think he was any masher.

"Howdy doo?" he says.

"Hello, yourself," I answers, curiouslike.

"Um-m"—he sort of makes noises—"er—er—your friend who just left you seems to be in trouble."

"What's your business—everybody's?" I snaps.

He flushed all up at that. Finally he says:

"Now please don't." Then he smiles curious. "I'm in the lamp business and—and—I like to help people!"

Take it from me, Mabel, he had a persuasive way with him—not like some men I've met who make you think of a small boy coaxing a mutt into the back yard so he can tie a can to its tail—and I found myself babbling the whole story about Bernice before I was through.

In the middle of it who should dance up but Mrs. Stryker, and everything but the clock had to stop for a while. She boomed around for a time and gave an initiation of Cleopatra calling down Julius Caesar and his whole blamed army, but my new friend stuck around like an organ grinder. Then, when I had finished, he looks serious-like and says:

"We'll have to think up some way to help the little girl out, but we mustn't let her know anything about it."

"All right," I says. "I'm right at your heels."

"Thank you," he remarks, "for bringing—er—this case to my attention. What did you say your name was?"

"Goldie, for short."

"It'll be Goldie for always," says he with a funny look. "Well, good-by until to-morrow."

"So long," I answers. "But you didn't say what your name was."

"Mr. Aladdin!" he says, as he swings out the door.

Honest, girlie, I sat there like I was dazed. In the lamp business! Mr. Aladdin! I didn't know whether to laugh or bawl. Yours, GOLDIE.

DEAR MABEL: Didn't write last eve 'cause I was as upset as a baby being spanked. First, I had a little spat with George, and then Bernice's troubles got on my mind. Now, while I like George, and know he's not one of them boys who thinks he's dressed up when he wears a cigarette and a cane, I'm not so serious as you'd notice it. Goodness knows I'm not looking for the kind of party who never heard of getting money any way but asking father, but two healthy eaters like us would grow about as fat as angleworms on his fifteen per. Of course many a girl falls in love with a man, or thinks she does, because there's no one else around. If a lad will devote all his spare time talking to a girl about herself, and listening to her talk about herself, the object of his affections will begin to snuggle up to him sooner or later. Also, I think a man who wants a girl to leave a good job and try to live on what's barely enough for one isn't in love with her very much—only in love with himself.

That's the trouble with George—he's always proposing. Why, he begins losing his common sense the minute he

enters a parlor with the light turned low, and becomes simply foolish by the time he reaches a settee built for two. While I don't mind him taking such liberties as bringing me candy and taking me to the movies as often as I please, I kind of think that all of that mush stuff can wait until the orange blossoms begin to fall.

Anyways, I was a little peeved with myself the next morning for being so abrupt with him just when the movies are starting to charge fifteen cents per. Between that, and being so busy because it started to rain and a lot of tango tots were phoning off their engagements, I didn't have much time to think of Bernice until I saw her coming in looking about as gay as a party walking to the electric chair. She acted as if she was trying to avoid me, but I turned on the glad smile, and that brought her over and she attempted a pitiful smile of her own.

"How are things?" I asks.

"They're all right, Miss Goldie," she says, like she was catching her breath.

I looked up from the signal lights just then and saw the tears start in her eyes and a desperate little line come around her mouth.

"Come on, girlie," I says, "and tell me all about it. Two heads are better than one even in a side show."

"Why—why—I told you a lie," she falters. "Everything's gone wrong. They won't buy my pictures—and—and I have only two days more!"

All the time I was thinking of Mr. Aladdin and wondering whether he was a kiddier or an amateur philanthropist. I remembered he wasn't much on looks, though it 'ain't always the handsome boys that behave the best; but somehow or other I just got to feeling that he was strictly on the level. Then I took a desperate chance.

"Listen, Bernice," I says, confident-like. "I've got a hunch that may pull you through. Now, if you promise to

go up to your room and get a good rest, I may have some word for you by morning."

A hopeful look came over her face for a moment, and then it died away.

"I'm afraid," she answers, "there's not much that you can do."

"Mebbe that's right," I replies. "But you've done your best. Let me try to do mine."

"Oh, indeed I will!" she almost cries. "Please forgive me!" Then she makes for the elevator to hide her feelings.

I must have sat there for an hour after that, just wondering whether I had done the sensible thing or not, and when I spotted a lemon-haired party swinging through the door and recognized Mr. Aladdin, I came near calling his name right out. Well, it wasn't no time before he had the story of my little heart-to-heart talk with Bernice and what I told her.

"Thank you for your confidence, Miss Goldie," he says, all grateful. "I'd have trusted your word the same way." Then he takes a package out of his pocket and hands me several cards. "I've found a way to help your friend—in fact I've manufactured a way and place. All you have to do is to give her one of these cards and tell her to go there with her paintings. She'll come out all right."

"Gee!" I gasps. "But you're some Mr. Aladdin, ain't you?"

"Sure," he smiles. "The real article. And say, Miss Goldie, you'd better make out the party's a friend of yours and not mention me."

"Anything you say," I agrees, and then looks at the card. Here is what was printed on it:

PMAL LUFREDNOW

Dealer in Modern Paintings

501 Fifth Avenue New York

"That's Greek or something foreign," I says. "How do you pronounce it?"

"You don't have to. Just give her

the card," he answers. "If you're curious yourself, spell it backward."

I did, as he hustled out the door, and it read: "W-o-n-d-e-r-f-u-l L-a-m-p"! Wouldn't that pester you, dearie? Yours,
GOLDIE.

DEAR MABEL: I guess you're waiting for what happened to Bernice like we used to look forward to them movie episodes in the "Perils of Patricia." Take it from me, that ain't any description of my feelings after I gave Bernice that card and waited for her to return from that Fifth Avenue address. How I did any work I'll never know, for I plugged in and out and helloed like a party in a trance, and when noon-time came and there was no sign of her, I was so nervous that when I tried to plug in on room No. 700, I rang up No. 963, which is some miss. By two o'clock I was so bad I was going to call John, the head porter, to tie me in the chair, when I hears a sort of sobbing sound, and the next thing I know Bernice is kissing me on the nose—which is some miss, too—and trying to tell me something.

"Oh, you dear, you! You dear!" she finally manages to say. "That Mr. Lufrednow bought all my paintings!"

It was some time before I got her calmed down and willing to go to her room. She had to show me the check first and tell me how it would save the little home that was all her and her mother had.

"I could have got it," she said in a wistful way, "only it was from a young man." She kind of choked then. "I never could have married George, though, if I'd allowed him to do it. Now—now——"

Then I quit the switchboard and lead her to the elevator. I guess she was

still excited when she got to her room, for she called almost everything from the hall maid to the fire department before she got a long-distance connection for home and mother.

Well, it must have been about an hour after I got on the job the next morning, when I sees Mr. Aladdin breeze in with some bags and go over to the register. A little later he passes me by without so much as a word or nod, and I watches him kind of puzzled as he stops and looks back toward the lobby. There was a peculiar look on his face, and I turns around to see Bernice coming our way. She was all smiles and about to say something, when she turns all pale and stops, suddenlike. The next minute that Mr. Aladdin is making for her with his two hands outstretched.

"Oh, George!" she says, as if there was something wrong with her throat. "Oh, George!" and put her hands in his.

That fussy old major called me at that minute about his glass of hot water for breakfast, and I missed what followed. The next thing I heard, she was telling him proudly about selling her pictures, and him standing there looking serious.

It was pretty late in the afternoon when I saw Bernice, and then she brought her friend over to introduce him. From the looks of the two of us you'd think we'd never met. However, before that I had taken a peek at the register, and would you believe it, there it was plain as day:

"George W. Aladdin, Pewee, Ohio."

Say, girlie! Next time I see a map of that State, I'm going to hunt up Pewee and pin a rose on it. Yours,
GOLDIE.



HE THAT IS WITHOUT SIN

By May Edginton

Author of "Happiness Ever After," "Sweet Revenge," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AS his usual lunch hour approached, Vandela trembled. He trembled, not with exhaustion, although all his nerves were stretched to the breaking point, but with hate—a crazy, blind, ungovernable hate of Studholme Forty. To suppress this outwardly, to cover it with an exterior of decent calmness, Vandela knew to be vitally necessary; therefore, he did his best, driving his mind from its delirious rehearsing to the funny little mundane questions of business which his head clerk put before him, to the booking of appointments, to the endeavor to understand, through the hubbub in his head, the gist of the telephone calls that came innumeraably all that morning. Henry Sebastian rang up to discuss nothing at all; and Martin to inquire if he wanted dinner that evening; half a dozen City offices wanted him for this or that; and then there was Lea. Soft, fresh, and amazingly glad her voice came, vibrating over the wires from her country peace.

She wanted to know nothing at all, like Henry; wished merely to inquire if he was well, and had he seen the Sebastians? And to say that the Canterbury bells were all bursting into their second blooming. Of the tremulous fears in her heart for the upshot of the

Studholme Forty crisis, none came over the wires to the man at the other end.

He answered her in a smooth voice, affectionately.

He groomed his hair and hands and face again punctiliously before he went out to lunch, but it was a wretched reflection which met him, after all his care, in the glass. He shuffled things together on his desk with a foreboding sense of finality, and tried to remember whether everything, business and personal matters both, was in order, against any long absence. For some reason, he could not imagine himself walking into this office as usual to-morrow morning. He struck his bell, and the head clerk looked in.

"By the way," said Vandela, avoiding his eyes, "I shall not be back to-day."

"Very good, sir. To-morrow as usual, sir?"

Vandela answered very slowly: "We'll see—ah, yes—yes, we'll see."

Then he went out, to lunch. He drove, as a refugee to a haven, to Maurice, who had his corner table reserved for him as soon as the news flew in that Dorian Vandela had entered the lobby. To this table Vandela headed as by instinct, and Maurice, with a quick glance at him, sketched out a lunch, and murmured of his own accord: "You'll drink Apollinaris, sir?"

"Yes."

Vandela ate that lunch; he tasted everything to the full, with his palate wonderfully in possession of its whole power of enjoyment; he ate it much as some condemned men are said to eat their last breakfast on earth, with a total flinging away of future. Some of the fatigue left his body, and his blood seemed to circulate again freely, relieving that abominable pressure it had made on the brain.

As he passed out, he said to Maurice: "Good-by."

It was only two-fifteen, so he set out to walk from Piccadilly to the Fulham Road, going by way of Sloane Street and the King's Road, and with a quick new sense of appreciation of light and color and the unique personality of Chelsea as he passed along. Into the dingier length of the Fulham Road he came, and, turning swiftly to the left, set his face now straight toward his goal.

Three o'clock had struck five minutes ago. The meetinghouse door was open, and no one was within as Vandela entered, carefully closing it behind him. He went like a hound on the trail straight through to the kind of parlor Forty called his vestry, and there was Studholme Forty himself, in a comfortable chair, with the three-o'clock edition of *The Wire*.

"Aha!" said Forty, rising with a warped sort of smile.

"G'day!" said Vandela, closing the second door behind him.

Neither man had any idea of shaking hands.

"Do take a pew," Forty invited, with the same warped grin.

"I'll stand, I think."

Forty seated himself again with a do-as-you-please air.

"Well?" he asked.

Vandela burst straight away into: "You know darned well why I'm here. You had the impudence to—to—write

me—a—a letter——" And the room was filled with blackness, as the restaurant had been the night before; only here it was Forty's face that swam and swayed about tantalizingly as if lighted by phosphorus.

Forty answered easily, regardless:

"The letter, Mr. Vandela, was true in all particulars."

"Supposing it to be so, what about it?"

Forty's hands waved with expressive negligence through the shifting cloud of blackness.

"How do I know, Mr. Vandela? The lady is not my wife."

"Leave Mrs. Vandela out of the question."

"But she is very much in the question." Forty laughed, and his laugh shuddered on Vandela's brain like the vilest discords on the ear of a sensitive musician, so that all his nerves shivered till his body shivered, too.

"Do sit down," said Forty, still regardless. "You are feeling nervous."

The blackness cleared away, so that Vandela could sum up the length and breadth and strength of the man lying back in the big chair, and he found himself doing it as methodically as a prize fighter.

He licked his lips.

"Leave my nervousness out, too. I'm come, after all, mainly for business. What's your price?"

Forty's hands waved.

"My poor British husband, I have no price."

"What do you mean?"

"I am not in need of money."

"What do you want, then, to hold your tongue?"

"You could offer no sufficient inducement."

Vandela saw, hazily, and stammered: "Who—who could?"

Forty smiled, regardless.

Lea's husband saw, knew in a flash, what manner of bribe the man would

have asked of her. Hell filled him, raged, tormented to be let loose. And Forty said:

"You'd better leave it between Mrs. Vandela and me. I've no doubt she is equal to——"

Vandela killed him.

Seven, perhaps eight minutes must have elapsed before he rose from the body on the floor and dragged it up again to the chair, where it lolled with a black face and the throat pulled horribly out of shape.

With his bare hands he had done it.

He sobbed a little for breath. "Oh, God!" he whispered, looking down on his shaking, snatching fingers. "They were strong!"

He suddenly ran on tiptoe from the vestry to peer into the church. It was still empty, and the door was shut.

He dusted his trouser knees. When Forty, leaping up, in realization at last, to meet him, had been felled, he had knelt across him, a knee over each elbow joint, while his hands twisted at the man's throat. The struggle had been quite slight; the ease of it seemed ridiculous.

He left the church quickly, and no one passing up or down the street gave him so much as a glance. He walked up into Beaufort Street, hailed a taxicab, and directed it to his flat. When he let himself in quietly, no one heard him.

He sensed the smell of the beast all over him, the beast that prowls and kills, murderous, lustful. He ran to the bathroom, turned on both taps, tore off his clothes, and lay wallowing.

Vandela clothed himself entirely afresh, walked into Lea's drawing-room, and rang the bell.

When Martin came, he just said:

"I'm in."

She disappeared with her air of trained intuition, and came again with her tray of appurtenances. As, expert, quiet, and kind, she set the tea table

for him, he could not help looking at her and thinking:

"How you'd run if you knew!"

He knew himself now really alone against the world of men.

He had a queer wish that Martin should smile at him before she left the room, and he played for it desirously, cunningly.

After trying several topics, he looked at himself in the over-mantel mirror, and said:

"I do look like a piece of boiled cod, don't I, Martin?"

Then the maid smiled, a kind, dimpling smile, friendly and sympathetic.

It helped him.

He poured out his tea, looking round at this room to which he had come back, with the ineradicable stain on his hands. It talked to him of Lea, and while he sat silent, he was glad to let it talk, to tell him of her joy in making it, to remind him just where he and she together had picked up this or that treasure, to lure him to recollection of long, tender hours, perfect domestic evenings, spent within its four blue walls.

Vandela sat there, looking round on all these reminiscences of Lea, and ate and drank in a wonderful content.

He had locked the secret into a dead man.

He was conscious of a sensation, now, of leisure, a great sensation. But little now remained to do, and he was moving slowly, placidly, finally, toward that last act. All the evening remained to him before its consummation, and here, among her books, her cushions, her flowers, he might spend the time, until——

He got up once and walked through the flat, looking into each room and saying to himself: "I hope she'll keep it; I'd like to think of her here."

Coming back to the drawing-room, he went through to the balcony, and listened to the rustle of the palms, looked at the velvet-leaved geraniums,

and smelled the musk. Impressions lay on him and clung like clothing, veiled the late disorder of his mind, and accented its present peace.

The cool of summer evening was dropping kindly over the town when Vandela at length sat down before his wife's bureau and began to write to her.

CHAPTER XXX.

He remembered to date the letter forward by several hours.

"Hullo, little thing," he began to write, and then, very slowly, choosing word by word:

When you get this letter, you're not to cry for me. I'm unworthy, Kiddie Lea, of you and that splendid baby. I promised, and I've failed you; you trusted, and I've let you down.

I've tried, and I can't do it. I've been drunk again; shocking drunk, kiddie, so beastly drunk that I'm afraid your nice servants here, who were left alone with me, will desert you, unless you'll convey my apologies to them. Will you? Anyway, darling, when they tell you and the coroner the tale, don't be hard in your dear heart on a fellow who tried to reform, and couldn't.

I'm keeping my side of the bargain, anyhow. I don't try to get out of that.

Try not to be too much shocked, little Lea. I love you very much, darling, and you've given me three such glorious years. Good-by, sweet.

DORIAN.

Vandela read it. "Reads true," he muttered, "reads true. I don't see that she'll ever think anything else. There'll be nothing to reproach herself with, anyhow."

He kissed the letter and said: "Her little fingers'll have you, you damn' lucky letter."

He sealed, stamped, and addressed it, and, as he laid it on the bureau, Martin opened the door again and announced in her precise voice:

"Mr. Hervey."

Jock Hervey came in almost sullenly, as if he hated the situation, and Vandela rose to meet him, after a second's hesitation holding out his hand.

"Hullo!" each said.

Vandela wondered, "What—what's he come for?" and the restless imps began to buzz in his brain again; but, after all, Hervey had only called on business, which he explained as he stood stiffly near the bureau.

"I rang up your office, but they said you'd left early, so, as it was urgent, I thought I'd call in here on my way home. The company I'm at present engaged with have lost two ledger clerks——"

Vandela listened to a dull maze of details, and smiled queerly as he said:

"To-morrow—why not leave it till to-morrow?"

Hervey pleaded urgency, and again Vandela strained his courtesy to hear, while the dull affair was laid before him. He did not know, knowing that neither did it matter, to what he had committed himself when Hervey finished, and extended a reluctant hand once more.

As for Hervey, he, too, was glad to close the interview; he dropped Vandela's hand quickly, and turned to go.

He caught sight, as he turned, of the letter, boldly addressed to Lea, on the bureau, and his old racking jealousy of the husband who might write anything and everything to the woman they both loved came back. He went out, aching the old ache for possession.

Vandela returned to the room after shutting the front door upon Hervey, and put the letter into his pocket, being clear-headed enough now to think out details with accuracy.

He dressed for dinner, and sat down at table, determined, and because of his determination, extraordinarily light-hearted—nearly light-headed—and reckless.

"I'll take a glass of champagne after the sherry, Martin."

The maid, too well trained to evince the surprise, the dismay, she felt, shot him a stealthy glance and went out to

the diminutive wine cellar. And she half wished that her kindness of mind, her delicacy of good manners, had not led her to place those two tempters, golden and red, every night before her master.

"If anything happens again," she whispered to the cook, as she rummaged, "I hope it won't be my fault. There was every chance for me to keep wine off the table."

When she hurried back, the man at the table had refilled his sherry glass.

The drink demon was silent; he said not a word; a little humbled, a little puzzled, by the mood of his late servant, he stood to watch.

Even through his pain, Vandela liked his second glass of sherry. It was mellow and subtle and suggestive. Its slurred voice spoke seductively. Next to the soup and the sherry, Martin had for him boned chicken, and a green bottle with a gold-foil neck. A shiver like ice, and a warmth like fire, ran all through him.

The drink demon crept near, recognizing this mood as a dear familiar.

Martin filled her master's glass, and he seized it almost from under her hand to take a delicious, long-forgotten sip at the bubbling gold. When he put the glass down, he felt better, clearer in brain and vision than he had done all day, and yet mad, like a man who, going to perdition, goes jauntily, arm in arm with his favorite friend. A curious splendor filled him as, dominant, active, hilarious, the taste came back.

He was eating well, and thinking of Lea, not miserably, but with exaltation. Once or twice he felt for the letter that, in the dressing room, he had transferred to the pocket of his dinner jacket. He kept reminding himself of the fact that the letter must be found with him—as if prompted by the evening's outburst, as if fresh written—

He drank three glasses of champagne with his chicken, and two more with his

sweet; another, unaccompanied, after he had finished with cheese, while the parlor maid moved about by the sideboard as if reluctant to leave him, casting an apprehensive glance at him ever and again.

A year ago Vandela would still have been fairly steady, but after his comparatively long abstinence, the wine had mounted already to his head, and it was in a thick, slurred voice that he spoke, as he turned to the hovering maid:

"Martin, I—I'll—have—whisky'n'—soda—in—in—"

"The drawing-room, sir?" she bleated impotently.

Something within him said clearly: "No, no, not there; not in Lea's room!" He looked up at Martin uncertainly.

"No, no; no—not draw'n'-room."

"In the library, sir?" she gasped timidly.

He replied, with solemn stolidity: "Yes."

Martin went out. He sat there and reached for the champagne bottle, but he had nearly drained it, so he turned it upside down and blinked at it foolishly. Trouble crept into his eyes for a moment, and shook his lips. His brain had a lapse of "Wha'm I doing?"

Martin came in again and moved about at the sideboard. He sat and regarded her furtively, wondering if dinner was over, and what her everlasting business was over there, anyhow. She fidgeted and fidgeted, her face grave, her eyes concerned; at last she turned round and murmured:

"I've put all your—things—in the library, sir."

"Wants to—get rid—of—me," he said aloud to himself, as if enlightened. Her hurried "Oh, no, sir!" he waved aside with an uncertain gesture of the hand, and rose, balancing himself carefully for a moment, and endeavoring to gain control of his tongue.

He got a certain lucidity in a few moments.

"Don't dishturb me again to-night," he said distinctly.

"Very good, sir," replied the scared woman.

Vandela went, balancing himself carefully, to the door, and fumbled for an instant down the jamb before his fingers found the handle. Then he swayed out across the corridor to the tiny room they called the library.

Martin had left the door open for him; also, she had lighted the reading lamp, and placed an evening paper by it, as if her good manners had noticed nothing sufficiently amiss to hinder its perusal. His deep leather chair was drawn up by the table. Also, the lamp-light glowed down upon the twinkle of cut glass, and the silver siphon holder.

Vandela looked all around him with a wild and troubled air, after he had let the door swing back from its spring to the lock again. He had come now into the ultimate prison house, into a little condemned cell, from which presently his soul would go forth, alone.

He was not too far gone to remember that something more was needed yet to complete the evidence of his letter; groping, he found it—Martin, the witness of his utter bestiality. He rang the bell.

She stood hesitantly in the doorway.

"Oh, Martin," he said, with gravity, "I—" Then he thought. "I'm expecting a messenger. Wha' time—you—go to bed?"

"Ten o'clock, sir."

"All ri'; all ri'; if he hasn't lef' anything f'me by ten, come in an' lemme know."

"Yes, sir."

She was glad to go.

"She sure—to come, sure—to—come," said Vandela to himself.

He lurched into the armchair.

He drew the letter out of his pocket and pushed it half under the tray.

"Might poshibly forget," he whispered.

He unlocked the tantalus, poured himself a generous libation, swished it slightly with soda, and drank.

The inexpressible ease! The warmth! The comfort!

A quarter of an hour later, he managed, somehow, to spill more into his emptied tumbler. The craving was on him now, quick and savage. He gulped that down, and poured out more yet.

Both servants looked in at ten o'clock, first Martin, then, at her beckoning, the cook; and they saw him once more at his old game, once more conquered by his old foe, slain in his old weakness—darkly drunk, heavily asleep.

They shut the door and ran from him down the corridor, locked their bedroom door, and gabbled of him fearfully. A wretch, they said, beyond recall.

Vandela awoke, thick-headed, to a curious dawn, morning light filtering in, met by the steady glow of the still-burning lamp. He had awakened to such dawns before, with the same hell-fire throat, the same twitching nerves under a dreadful lethargy, the same agonizing head. For a while he sat there, coming slowly back to things, identifying first one object in the room, then another, and trying for a few instants to remember.

The first thought that came with any degree of coherence was: "My God! I've been drunk again; and I'd promised her—" Then, suddenly, fell the full light.

His virility was dormant, his manhood slept in that hour of dawn after the pitiful orgy, but his body now shivered away. He looked round the four walls of that condemned cell; a clock ticked from the mantelpiece, and ticked away life resistlessly. His eyes fell on a portrait of Lea with her son, beautiful, soft, hopeful, maternal.

Vandela smiled. "Hullo, little thing,

hullo!" he whispered softly. "I'm not going to fail you."

He slid forward a drawer in the undraped table, and took from it a little Webley & Scott, which he had possessed for many years, with the average man's love of firearms. He looked at it curiously. "At last you've got a bit o' work to do." The tremor of his hand, as he loaded the magazine, was due only to the influence of last night.

He looked at Lea again, and she was smiling out of the portrait, directly at him; slowly he rose and turned her face to the wall. "You'd better not look, or I——"

As slowly, he returned to the chair, sat down again, and took the pistol in his right hand. His heart beat irregularly.

"I'll count. One—two—three."

The shrieking women rushed in to find him, relaxed in the easy-chair. The pistol had dropped near his hand, a letter to his wife lay on the table, and her portrait was turned to the wall.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Lea telephoned to her husband's office at ten o'clock in the morning, and the stereotyped tones of his head clerk replied: "Mr. Vandela's not here yet, madam."

She rang up the flat.

Martin answered her—Martin stupid, stumbling, confused. "Mr. Vandela—Mr. Vandela's not here, 'm." The gist of her halting words fined down to that.

Lea said: "He must be on his way to the office; must be. Oh, yes, he must be! I'll ring up again." She trembled and her face was white. An infernal suggestion had been whispered to her since she had opened her morning paper at breakfast, and read, in rampant headlines, of Studholme Forty's death.

There was no trace of the murderer.

Already the press seemed inclined to write it down as one in the long list of unsolved crimes. But Lea, with the memory of that recent scene upon her, felt sick and faint. She reassured herself a little by saying: "Of course, he had many enemies."

She rang up again, both the office and the flat, and while the office could give no information of Mr. Vandela's movements, Martin now mumbled so much incoherence into the transmitter that the woman at the other end called sharply: "Is Mr. Vandela ill? I insist on knowing."

The maid mumbled many words, which ended in "coming down to see you, 'm."

"All right," said Lea, and hung the receiver upon its hook. "If," she thought, "Dorian is coming down, everything is all right."

But when she drove her little car to the station to meet the most probable train, just before lunch, it was not Dorian who alighted from a first-class carriage, but the oldest partner in his firm of solicitors, a gray-headed, fatherly man, who looked both surprised and horror-struck to see Mrs. Vandela waiting out there, in snowy white from top to toe, with her air of anxious interest that did not rob her face of its vividness.

The lawyer came slowly out into the station yard in response to her waved greeting, and, raising his hat, began slowly:

"This is a pleasure—an unexpected pleasure——"

She said, searching the platform with her eyes: "It is, indeed. I am expecting my husband."

"Your husband?"

"My parlor maid telephoned me that he was coming, I understood——"

The old man waited a moment before he informed her very gently:

"I'm here, instead, Mrs. Vandela. Will you give me a lift?"

"He's not coming, then?"

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Vandela, that he's not coming."

A look at his face, reserved, gray, and sad, and the peculiar fears fled to her. She started the little car quietly, and, as she drove, tried to ask questions, which, one by one, he evaded as soon as they were uttered. The short journey became silent, ominous.

In the house she faced him, head high, hands clasped, at tension. "Mr. Lister, you have something to tell me which I am sure would be better told quickly. Don't keep me waiting. Whatever it is, I assure you I can bear it."

"I don't know how to do it," he said uncertainly. Then: "My dear Mrs. Vandela—my poor child—I wish I hadn't to tell you, but——"

He stopped, looked into his hat, twisted his gloves; before her young agony, the man of sixty stammered like a nonplused schoolboy.

Lea dropped into a chair.

"You've got to tell me quickly."

"There has been a bad accident——"

Watching her face closely and anxiously, the old man was relieved to see the faint color fixing in her cheek, the slackening of the strain. She repeated numbly:

"An accident?"

"Your husband has been shot."

Her voice was extremely quiet. "Who shot him?"

He spread out his hands in a little gesture of helplessness, of relinquishment, of evasion.

"My dear Mrs. Vandela, bear it calmly. He shot himself."

She called out uncontrollably, "*Oh, my God!*" Then, "And——"

The man understood. "It was fatal," he said, very regretfully. "I'll tell you everything you want to know presently. First I want to see you take something—a glass of wine, a cup of milk—something. I've got girls of my own, my dear. I know. And first, too,

there is this letter which he had written, evidently trusting that some one would deliver it to you."

He handed her Vandela's carefully made confession of iniquity.

"The dining room is across the hall?" he asked, as if of himself, subduedly. "I'll wait there."

She was alone.

Shaking fingers tore open the envelope; stricken eyes devoured the last love words of the man who had worshipped her too well to tell her aught but lies in this, his supreme hour. And when she had read, and read again, and understood, she flung herself on the couch and wept until she could not, of her own volition, have stopped weeping.

The old solicitor, intruding delicately, withdrew again to ring the bell in the dining room. He said to the butler who came: "Is there a woman servant here whom your mistress likes? If so, send her to Mrs. Vandela at once—and you, come here."

The butler went, and returned, hushed and scared. Old Lister said:

"Your master shot himself early this morning."

"Sir!"

The lawyer added: "I'm sorry. I'm deeply sorry. You know—you've been here some time?"

"Ever since Mr. and Mrs. Vandela were married, sir," said the servant, in a shaken voice.

"Then you know—you are familiar with Mr. Dorian Vandela's weakness? He shot himself after a—a lonely drinking bout."

The servant kept silence, trembling and aghast, and the lawyer, who had done too much of this sad business in his time to be unable to come to swift decisions now, eyed him sharply.

"I shall want lunch," he said. "Keep things going. You'd better start by looking after me."

The servant motioned to the table, and pulled out a chair.

"It's all cold, sir."

Lister sat down, and kept the man busy, the while his ears listened for sounds from that other shut room, and when he caught the muffled sobbing, he sighed.

"Mrs. Vandela has a mother living?" he questioned.

"No, sir, I don't think so. No near relatives as far as my wife and I know, sir."

"She wants some one," the old man said. "There should be some one she cares for with her now. A friend—what friend could we send for?"

The butler's eyes strayed absently to the window as he considered this point; the lawyer's gaze followed his as absently; and, as if in miraculous answer to their urgent question, they saw a tall, red-headed man striding up the garden path, coming from a car which had just snorted to a standstill outside the gate.

"Who's this?" cried the lawyer.

"Mr. Hervey," said the butler, and hurried out.

Hervey came in without any formality of ringing or knocking, and he looked at the butler, and the servant looked back confidently at him.

"Mrs. Vandela," said Hervey, like a command. Without hesitation, the butler swung open the sitting-room door, and there Hervey saw her prone upon the couch, torn by sobbing, with a distracted woman servant standing by.

In another moment he and Lea were alone.

He knelt down by her and lifted her head to his shoulder.

"Lea, look up!"

She looked up and clung to him.

"I'm here, you see," he whispered. "Lean on me. I drove down directly I heard. Lean on me, little Lea."

In her closed hand was crushed the letter. She opened her fingers, and thrust the twisted sheet upon him.

"Oh, Jock!" she wept. "It's so sorrowful; so sorrowful."

"I know," he whispered, "I know. Just hold to me."

"Read his letter."

Hervey read it, and very slowly that last night's interview with Vandela in his flat reconstructed itself before him. Clearly came the moment of envious hate in which he had seen, lying on the bureau near by, a letter addressed to Lea.

But Vandela had been quite sober.

"He must have written it," Lea sobbed, "after he recovered and remembered what he had done. Poor Dorian! He must have written it early this morning, Jock, just before—"

"Must he?" Hervey said, under his breath.

"Jock, hold me!"

Hervey took her closer.

"So, little Lea, he—he's left you to me?"

"Oh, Jock, yes! Yes! Yes! Don't go, Jock!"

"I'm not going."

He had had a hard boyhood; he had run a lonely course; he had met creation at her strangest, and she had never frightened him; he was, always, a man who could hold his tongue.

THE END.



HER HUSBAND

By Anne Warner

Author of "The Rejuvenation of Aunt Mary," etc.

JERRY was a big, splendid fellow—so big that he had a right to be splendid, and so splendid that he couldn't help knowing it. Perhaps he knew it a bit too well, but then most men in his situation are bound to do that.

Anyway, he was fond of trout fishing, and, being fond of trout fishing, he was naturally attracted to the brand-new resort which advertised square miles of virgin forests with sport for the multitude. Siddons had been there and said it was all true and that Jerry would be in paradise. Jerry, with the hotel's folder in his vest pocket, was easily persuaded to believe his friend's statement, and took the Saturday train. Siddons followed him on Sunday. "She" arrived the Tuesday after!

The reason why I went into the above details was so that you might clearly understand that this was a very new place. The peculiar thing about a new place is that the people who go there are generally as new as the place. No one has ever heard of any one else, and so it was but natural that Siddons and Jerry, who were not new and would never have dreamed of coming except for the trout, should never before have heard of "her."

"She" arrived in a peacock-blue

broadcloth traveling dress, the cut and style of which were so perfect that every one forgave and forgot the color. She brought with her a maid and sixteen trunks. There are no better social vouchers—in a new place—than a maid and sixteen trunks, so she was accepted with open arms, and Siddons introduced her to Jerry, and Jerry—who had nothing half-hearted about him—fell madly in love with her at once.

Being madly in love leads naturally to close acquaintance, and by Friday the necessity for time to know her better yet led to Siddons being obliged to fish alone.

Matters went on so fast that at the end of the week—that is to say, on Saturday night—Jerry felt that he knew her through and through. Then Sunday came, and Monday, and their passing carried him so much farther ahead that when he had known her a week, he was acutely conscious of the fact that he didn't know her at all. When this fact dawned upon him, he ceased to be madly in love, reformed completely, went 'way back, and began all over at the beginning.

He did this because she piqued his curiosity and interested him beyond the point to which any other had ever led or driven his buoyant conceit. He felt

that she was well worth some extra trouble, and felt, also, that he was more than willing to undertake the work necessary to her winning. The peacock broadcloth gown did not seem to fit into her general make-up at all—she certainly had more to her than that particular color would ever have led any one to expect. She was beyond a shadow of a doubt an especially curious bit of bewitching womanhood, and he felt his newer and deeper interest developing almost as rapidly and strongly as the first and commoner phase of his susceptibility was accustomed to doing.

Siddons fished, and his friend walked and talked with "her." It was all very delightful until, just as the fortnight was closing in, she suddenly referred to an expected arrival upon the morrow.

"I shan't be alone any more," she told him, looking straight up into his face and smiling, "and you can come and call on me in my own parlor. That'll be so much nicer. I'm always glad when my husband's with me and I can ask my friends to my own rooms."

He ran the cord of his monocle up and down through his fingers. Well, what of it? Of course he must have known that she must have a husband. All women naturally had husbands. It didn't make any difference to him, anyhow, because he was only fooling a little. He never for a moment had thought of being in earnest.

"I'll be especially glad to have you alone in my own parlor," she continued, in a tone that sounded more serious than any he had ever heard from her before, "because I want to say something very important indeed to you. It's something I want to ask you about, and it's a subject that one would never think of trying to discuss in public."

He looked at her in some surprise, but she never noticed the look and continued:

"I expect my husband about noon to-

morrow. Won't you come in at five o'clock and meet him, and let me give you a cup of tea?"

He saw no reason why he should refuse to meet her husband or drink her tea, so he accepted the invitation to do both, and the next day, having gone fishing to please and pacify Siddons, he hurried home extremely early, so that he might please and pacify his own contradictory inclinations.

Her suite was on the third floor and gave upon the forest. It was one of those which include two towers and a balcony. The tea table was spread upon the balcony, and some lazy East Indian chairs and rugs and cushions kept it company there. He observed all this during the half minute that he waited in the small reception room. Then she came in—and her husband.

The caller received rather a startling shock when his eyes met those of the husband.

For the husband was a giant, and his eyes were simply electrifying in their piercingly quick and intent glance. He was very handsome, and the handclasp that followed the introduction was most cordial—almost too cordial, in fact, for it was of that species which preclude all sensation for ten minutes after.

They passed out upon the balcony at once, and she poured the tea, chattering gayly, almost nervously, as she did so. Her husband sat at her side in silence, looking sometimes at her, sometimes at Jerry, and sometimes at the forest. He did not appear particularly interested in what she was saying, but his expression was more placid than bored.

After the tea drinking was over, a maid came out and removed the tray. Then her husband placed his chair so that he could rest his feet upon the balustrade, and offered Jerry his cigar case. Thereupon, the latter helped himself to a cigar, and soon discovered that it was by long odds the best that

he had ever knocked over the head with his cigar cutter.

She had been laughing and talking every minute up to now, but when the two cigars were well alight, she suddenly grew quite grave, leaned her elbows upon the table, rested her chin upon her crossed hands, glanced at her husband, and addressed the visitor thus:

"You won't mind my being very serious indeed now—will you?—because—as I said before—I have something very serious that I want to talk to you about—and I never could talk to you alone until my husband came."

Jerry felt his fingers seeking the cord of his monocle in a species of qualm over the extreme earnestness of her address, but before there was any such a pause as demanded filling by him, she went on:

"You don't know how dreadfully I've wanted to be alone with you ever since I first met you. It's so crazing to have things to say that you can't say unless you're positive that you won't be interrupted—and you know, although we've been together all day long, still we've never been really like this before."

Jerry felt horribly uncomfortable, and didn't know what to say, so looked at his patent-leather toes and shook his head. He didn't know just why he shook his head, but it seemed the only safe thing to dare just then.

"What I want to talk about," she went on, "is the feeling that men like you and women like me have for one another. I know that you are just as attractive to women as I am to men, and I want to know whether the basis of that attraction is the same with you as it is with me."

She paused; her husband was looking at the forest; Jerry was grasping the cord of his monocle with a strength that he could feel in the back of his neck. Within his heart he felt that the

peacock blue hadn't been so far wrong after all.

"Do you think you get my meaning?" she asked after a moment.

"I don't think that I do," he answered bluntly.

She laughed softly.

"Yes, you do, too. It's a species of vanity—now isn't it? We're naturally attractive, and we know it, and we want every one else to know it too—don't we? You wanted me to like you the first instant that you saw me—didn't you? Why won't you own up?"

Her husband was looking at her now; he was so large that the back of his chair was tipped against the wall and his legs bridged the width of the balcony. Jerry, big as he was, was a pygmy beside him. He wished like thunder that he was off fishing.

"I can't at all admit any of that," he asserted.

"What nonsense! But if you won't admit it, it's true, none the less. But we'll go on a step farther. Grant the mutual attractiveness, and let's see how much farther the similitude extends. When you met me and were attracted by me, did you recognize the fact right off or did it dawn upon you gradually? I saw that you were *épris* at once. You see I'm honest."

Her husband was shaking the ash from his cigar, and as he did so, his eyes encountered Jerry's. The latter was beginning to feel decidedly ill.

"I don't know that I thought anything about it," he said miserably.

"You don't expect me to believe that, do you?" she asked, half smiling. "Not after the way you acted that first evening! Don't you know that I saw you were wild about me from the first instant? A woman always knows. And what I want to know is—does a man know, too? Or does the woman hide her heart better? Did you know that I was specially interested in you before I told you so?"

Upon this Jerry nearly fell out of his chair; his start of astonishment was so unfeigned that her husband started, too, leading him to believe, for one brief quarter of a second, that his last hour was surely at hand.

But she did not appear to notice either action.

"Do answer?" she pleaded.

"You should have been a lawyer," he said, trying to breathe regularly.

"Oh, *dear!*" she cried petulantly. "That's what they all say! Every time that a man falls in love with me I try to get him to tell me the true inwardness of the masculine side—and he *never* will!"

She paused for an instant and then hurried on:

"Just answer me one question, please! After a man knows that a woman is interested in him, is she just as interesting to him as she was before he was sure of her regard? Do you want to be with me just as badly now as you did at first? Do tell me that."

She looked at him, waiting.

Her husband threw away his cigar, folded his arms, and—waited, too.

Jerry felt his shirt collar melting; it wasn't a warm day, either. He threaded the cord to his monocle up and down through his fingers, recrossed his legs, and coughed.

"Really," he said at last, "really, you must believe me when I say that this is the first time I ever posed as a psychological problem, and I don't at all know how to play the part."

She looked disappointed.*

"You won't own up," she said, shak-

ing her head. "Well, I've never yet found the man that would. They're all alike—men are—and my husband is the only exception to the lot."

She rose as she spoke and, passing behind her husband, threw her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"Oughtn't you to go now?" she asked, looking over his head at the stunned, benumbed, and paralyzed caller. "It's quite a quarter of six, and we've all to dress before dinner."

Jerry arose with the promptitude of a steel spring just loosed in its coiling.

"I'm sorry not to have given satisfaction," he said, "but—really——"

She extended her hand.

"I don't bear you any ill will," she said, smiling.

Her husband quitted his seat and gave the visitor another heart-crushing, muscle-rending handclasp.

Then at last Jerry got out into the corridor and breathed again.

Siddons found him packing when he came in to dinner.

"Going?" he asked in astonishment.

"Business telegram," Jerry explained briefly, throwing his toothbrush in on top and banging the cover down.

"Then you didn't get to the tea party?"

"Yes, I did, too."

"Was her husband there?"

"Oh, yes, her husband was there."

"Horrible about him, isn't it?"

"What?" Jerry asked, turning sharply.

"Didn't you know that he's deaf and dumb?"



THE love life of a woman does not necessarily include her life love.



PLAYS AND PLAYERS

By

ALAN DALE

THE summer comes with flower and bee"—inevitably and quite prosaically—and brings with it a curious theatrical tradition. In the theatrical manager's mind is firmly imbedded the idea that in the warm weather the finest and most fervid dramatic instinct must wilt and subside. The dramas in which we flattered ourselves that our artistic appreciation revealed, the delights that we perceived intuitively, the intellectual feasts that catered to our best natures—all must be arbitrarily relinquished. Why? The weather has changed.

From comparatively sane and intelligent beings, the theatrical manager loves to believe that the summer converts us into a series of pleasantly driving imbeciles. We are no longer fit to cope with problems dear to the cooler weather; our mental outfit balks at wit, humor, repartee, or epigram. The intricacies of a clever plot baffle and bewilder us. We are "not ourselves." Some dreadful strain of babbling idiocy is brought to the surface by the rise in temperature, and just because "summer comes with flower and bee." As soon as the season is threatened, managers make all sorts of preparations for the awful event—for really, when you come to think of it, to be divested of all our cerebral qualities is awful—and hideous announcements of "summer" attractions rend the air!

The most gruesome of all these plans is the construction of the musical play arranged to appeal to our battered intelligences. This is not only gruesome, but exceedingly difficult. The task of making the musical play more inane in the warm weather than it has been in the more bracing atmosphere might well affright the theatrical manager. When the thermometer is normal, the musical show is designed to please the Tired Business Man, a mythical being supposed to be devoid of all thinking apparatus; when the thermometer is abnormal, behold, we are all classed with that discouraging myth, and the measure of the "show" is taken accordingly.

The manager believes religiously—and the religion of a theatrical manager is lovely—that all our critical faculties die in the summer. There is no particular reason for this creed that I have ever been able to discover. It is simply because it *was*. It is not even necessary to consider its origin, even if it were possible. I don't like to compare this summer state to that of children, because the young idea is bright, alert, and vigorous, and children would not tolerate the rapidity, the pointlessness, and the drab inconsequence of the entertainments offered us in the warm weather, but the managerial idea is that we *are* children of an undeveloped and quite irresponsible caliber, and must be treated accordingly.

The musical play in summer must be infinitely more foolish and irrelevant than it is in winter. Its "book" must be relieved of all semblance of intelligence, and its music must be what critics love to call "frothy." It must be flamboyantly girled. By that I mean that it must contain beves of charming maidens guaranteed to be "lookers" only. Those who can sing, dance, or talk are not at all in demand. Sometimes this theatrical chowder is called a "review," principally because it reviews nothing. It must be noisy, brassy, and full of "ginger." I use the word "ginger" in a purely parrotlike manner. I have really no conception of its meaning when applied to the musical show.

You may allege that all this sort of thing occurs in winter and is not peculiar to summer. Sometimes it does, but then it goes swiftly to the storehouse, thither impelled by the irate remarks of critics. In summer, the critic is quite aware of conditions. His favorite remark on the subject of the summer show is that it is a pleasant pastime for the warm weather and must not be considered critically. In fact, the task of the critic is easy in summer. He becomes merely a reporter, and has no views. Should he be unable to curb his cool-weather opinions, he is looked upon as a hypercritic—and that is quite odious, I assure you.

Another feature of the torrid season—or of its approach—is the perfectly illogical event known as the "revival." During the season "proper," such a thing as a revival would be ridiculous, but as soon as the season becomes *improper*, we are expected to rush to see a lot of old and mildewed plays that have been relegated to obscurity for years. They have been withdrawn because they have ceased to please—naturally. No sooner does the summer come with flower and bee than the old plays are trotted out. Isn't it funny?

Originally they were produced with fine casts, selected from the best people available, but in the warm weather they are offered with quite inferior people—usually stars. In the season *improper*, the star cast is almost inevitable. The actors do not fit the characters in the plays at all, but they are stars whose names are often displayed in electric light. Therefore, it is argued, warm-weather audiences must be anxious to see them. I don't know why.

The "revival" always amuses me tremendously. The young critic is forced to read up ancient history, and pretend to be a hundred when he is probably nineteen. The old critic becomes a nuisance and a bore, because he grows reminiscent and addicted to malignant comparison, than which there is no greater crime. The revival is a splendid field for controversy and dullness, and rarely gives pleasure to anybody. It is usually rejected even by the box office. To the manager, however, it is a case of "hope springs eternal." He is the only optimist.

Then in summer we have farce. We are managerially supposed to be inordinately anxious to laugh, and there is an absurd tradition that we always laugh at farce—of the same old brand. In winter, when we are rational, we frequently laugh at tragedy or melodrama—and I always think that the heartiest laugh is that which melodrama educes—but in summer our mirth can be coaxed only by ridiculous plays dealing with marital infidelity, mistaken identity, and rough-and-tumble comedy. These must be devoid of real humor or genuine wit; otherwise our weather-beaten intellects would be unable to endure them. They are offered for a "summer run," and only the habitual New Yorker knows the iniquity of that.

Take, for example, little Miss Marie Tempest. She has appeared during the

season in various plays that gave her the coveted opportunities. With the advent of the flower and bee, however, she selected a new comedy entitled "A Lady's Name," by Cyril Harcourt, that would have been impossible in September or October, and not a soul had the temerity to declare that it was unworthy of her. Why? Because the weather was warming up.

Miss Tempest is always charming. Even in summer, she could not quite lose the delicacy of appeal and the subtle jocundity that are her stock in trade. So, in "A Lady's Name," although she appeared in the most unpalatable rôle of an authoress advertising for a husband in order to "make copy," nobody said her nay. She was actually displayed cooking a dinner, burning the pudding, beating the eggs, and peeling potatoes, and we laughed in our best warm-weather style. It was all so summery.

Before that—and still with due reference to the flowers and bees—she had appeared in a revival of an old play originally entitled "The Idler" and rechristened "The Great Pursuit," and although her work was admirable and thoroughly enjoyable, the revival appeared to anger us, and it was withdrawn; the usual fate of this sort of thing, in spite of the theatrical manager's optimism.

Even in a warm-weather play, however, Miss Tempest is better than a dozen other actresses in cool-weather entertainments. The climate never affects the quality of her work, though it is obliged to influence the quality of her play, for the managerial reasons noted above. "A Lady's Name" was rapturously received by warm-weather critics, who, in the season proper, would have been as saucy as they dared to be.

Two musical shows designed to run all summer—and they are all designed to do that, on the "hope-springs-eter-

nal" principle—were "See America First" and "Come to Bohemia." These were typical of the curious theatrical traditions that I have been endeavoring to set forth. In "Come to Bohemia" we were treated to a stupendous dose of "Latin Quarter," which is a sort of managerial fetish. We never care about it; it never arouses any enthusiasm; we do not even understand it, for Bohemia in New York is frightfully expensive and vulgarly decorative; but it is prescribed for us, and so we get it. We had, earlier in the season, savored this "Latin Quarter" quite acutely in "The Girl Who Smiles," but that made no difference. The summer had come with flower and bee, and we were no longer able to reason logically. They gave us "Come to Bohemia"—and they took it away from us.

If the theatrical manager's tradition meant anything *but* tradition, and the warm-weather shows succeeded and pleased us, there would be little to say. All we could do would be to grin and bear them. But they do not succeed; they invariably irritate, and they are usually withdrawn in rapid-transit manner. The curious thing is that, in spite of all this, they are presented season after season, and the same tactics are relentlessly pursued. Grocers and dry-goods people shelve articles that are rejected, and profit by their experiences. Not so the theatrical manager. The idea that we *could* enjoy a fine drama or a witty comedy or an intelligent spectacle in summer never enters his head. Nor do I think that it ever will do so.

Miss Margaret Anglin revived the almost-forgotten Wilde play known as "A Woman of No Importance," for the sake of the flower and bee, and apparently, as a side issue, for the stellar ambition of Mr. Holbrook Blinn. Why this admirable actress stayed away from us while we were in full

possession of our sane minds, and elected to appear when—according to the theatrical manager—we had become silly and puerile, is a mystery. There are so many stars who could more plausibly be “presented” in the brainless season, and who really belong to it and fit into it charmingly. The original cast of “A Woman of No Importance” being quite outside of the ken of the youthful critic, no effort was made to “institute comparisons.” I could do it, but I won’t. I prefer to be misunderstood, and to pose as a youthful critic, than to assert brazenly and unashamedly that I saw Miss Rose Coghlan in this Wilde play at the Fifth Avenue Theater in 1893. It would be an awful confession to make—all the more awful because it would be mercifully true. Let me be youthful, please. Anything rather than drooling reminiscently!

Miss Anglin’s revival was good enough for September or October, if any revival of so old a play could possibly occur during those very significant months. It seemed rather a pity that it was set before us at the moment of our pictorial imbecility, for in that way it disarmed criticism, which is always dangerous.

Sir Herbert Tree, being English and wotting nothing of New York’s silly season, produced his third tercentenary tribute to Shakespeare, in the shape of “The Merchant of Venice,” at the New Amsterdam Theater, and graced the occasion diplomatically—for the titled actor’s diplomacy is far ahead of his histrionism—by permitting Miss Elsie Ferguson to appear as *Portia*. I shall take advantage of the warm weather and not criticize this event. Even a critic must relax occasionally, and no manager can reasonably object, as his idea is to render criticism in the flower-and-bee time impossible, or at least unnecessary. It seems unkind to set down this production of “The Merchant of

Venice” as a “summer show,” but one must conform to the managerial régime. After April—to be precise—nothing in the theater really matters. And we have the Winter Garden, which is not nearly as chilly as it sounds. But even the Winter Garden realizes summer!

Sir Herbert followed “The Merchant” with “The Merry Wives of Windsor,” and played *Falstaff* with stomachic vigor. This Shakespearean play is silly enough for mid-July, in my opinion, but I don’t care to argue the point tercentenarily. Please do not write to me and call me rude names, for they could not possibly budge my views on the subject of “The Merry Wives of Windsor.”

Another musical show was “Molly O,” at the Cort Theater, from the factory of Harry B. and Robert B. Smith—a factory that is remarkable in its way, as it never seems to suffer from strikes or the malevolence of labor unions, but placidly turns out its “material” as the sausage machine turns out—sausages.

It was the Smiths who dished up “Molly O” for the summer season, and it was a Mr. Woess who aided and abetted them by his music. This is possibly the best instance of warm-weather attraction that I can offer, and criticism hides its diminished head. If I’m not mistaken, however, one writer asserted that it was “the worst musical comedy of the season”—which *should*, according to the managerial idea, infer that it would be a tremendous success in summer. I wonder why the sponsors of this form of entertainment, in order to live up to their pet tradition, do not advertise: “This is the worst. Come and see it, all ye disabled intellects!” Producers really do vie with one another in presenting the worst, so why not boldly announce the fact?

However, the silly season will not conclude without other tributes to our

disintegrated mental condition, and I might almost say that this will be "continued in our next" as a serial. All we can do is to hope for the worst—which is the managerial best, in the summertime. The theater lives by its traditions. Tradition is the very breath of its life. It has its season proper, and its season *improper*, and these rarely vary. When they do, there is an outcry, and managers are aghast at the audacity of it all.

If, after an absence from earth, I were permitted to return, I could unerringly discover the season of the year by the brand of theatrical entertainment offered. I could never doubt the summer season, at least, with its musical shows, its revivals, and its melancholy

farces. The fragrance of the flower, or the sting of the bee, would not be needed. The simple and ingenuous imbecility of the theater is the inevitable indication.

Wouldn't it be funny if some wag of a manager—I'm bound to say that I've never met him—were to produce Ibsen, Shaw, Maeterlinck, Pinero, and Barrie in summer, and the "Molly O's" and the "Bohemias" and the revivals when the season opened in September? Personally I don't think that his exchequer would suffer more by that routine than by the traditional method. It is so difficult to believe that idiocy has its own special season—set apart for the exercise of its own sparkling inanity.



—BUT FOUND HER OUT

I CALLED on her, but found her out.
 It was to be a great surprise.
 I had the ring to end all doubt.
 I called on her, but found her out.
 I saw her gaze with tempting pout
 Into another's love-lit eyes.
 I called on her, but—found her out.
 It was to be a great surprise.

JACQUES.



INSIDE THE LINES with the Editor

War Babies—What Future?

THERE are thousands of nameless units of humanity beginning a fight for existence in Europe to-day. They are as much a product of war as sightless men, armless youths, and devastated family circles. But they are not as easily disposed of. They have no legitimate excuse for being, and the farther down the road they go, the more frequent will be their obstacles to success. The dawn of their lives is in the dusk. There is no encouraging glimmer along the horizon—no promise of a brighter day.

But they are here. That is the one fact, about them, that is not open to debate. Beyond that, there are no two opinions that concur upon the smallest phase of their possible careers. The question should be a national one, since a national disaster fathered them. But a baby is a baby—and has never been successfully handled except by its own mother. And when its own mother turns it over to be part and parcel of the state's machinery, its life tragedy is complete.

A nameless, soul-searing dread fosters its conception and grows in the mother's heart. It is not as if it were the penalty of an impulsive moment; it is an infliction, a curse. And what is bred in its bone will scar the flesh and poison the heart as soon as the age of understanding makes that possible.

The lives that have gone out leave aching voids in the hearts of their dear ones. But there is a soothing sense of heroism, of glory, as part recompense. The lives that have come in do not balance the scales; there is no glory about them. Pity the war babies. They are indeed the dregs of war. A. W.

Going Back

A YEAR ago, when Vassar was celebrating the semicentennial of its opening, several newspapers spoke of it as "the first institution for the higher education of women in America." This statement is incorrect by from four to twelve centuries.

The Toltecs, who flourished in Mexico from about 700 to 1200, had an advanced civilization. They grew maize and cotton, built roads, erected colossal monuments and temples, wove fabrics, made pottery, knew how to fuse metals and cut the hardest stones, made sundials, knew the cause of eclipses, measured time by a solar year, and devised a calendar that brought them to within an almost inappreciable fraction of the length of the tropical year as established by the most accurate observations.

The Aztecs who drove them out some time in the thirteenth century adopted much of their civilization. The young of both sexes were educated, respec-

tively, by the priests and priestesses. The women shared in all the occupations of the men, and were taught, like them, the arts of reading, writing, ciphering, singing in chorus, dancing, and were even initiated in the secrets of astronomy. It is comforting to know that during the dark ages of our own civilization, the sun was shining somewhere.

Men who yearn for the old-fashioned woman must not let their yearnings take them too far back, or they'll find that they've caught up with the present.

T. D. G.

A Bill to Regulate Bargains

TO the majority of shoppers and bargain hunters the Stephens-Ashurst bill is perhaps not even a name, yet it is of prime importance to their interest. "Never buy a thing because it is cheap," was one of Thomas Jefferson's ten rules of conduct, but bargains are dear to the human heart, masculine as well as feminine, and bright are those moments of life when we can proudly point out to friends the feat of having bought a tube of some well-known tooth paste for seven cents less than usual, or call attention to a standard make of rug that we got for a quarter off the authorized price.

"How can they do it?" we have asked, pleased, yet amazed at the philanthropy of our big stores.

"We don't see how they can!" our friends have honestly echoed.

But the secret of the *modus operandi* is out, and, knowing the true inwardness of the matter, we no longer can look upon our extraordinary bargains with such complacent joy; for we have learned that cutting prices on a standard article has been merely the bait used to get us within certain emporium precincts that we might buy other articles on which there was an abnormal profit, we being likely to believe that all other goods offered there were in the same class with our "bargain." Also, we learned that the aforesaid philanthropic practice incidentally cuts the commercial throats of smaller rivals in trade who cannot afford to play that game.

Department stores are held to be chief sinners in this respect; and all of us are familiar with the famous test case involving one of them, not long since, in which the cut-rate price of books was fought in the courts, the department store winning out on the grounds that the publishers, in seeking to control prices, placed themselves in monopolistic ranks. But, at the time, the main fact was lost sight of—that the regular bookseller was the real sufferer, and that neither the publishers nor the public had been especially sinned against.

Now, however, the tendency is to encourage the small, independent retailer of merchandise. Hitherto, it has been regarded as legitimate for a department store to afford smaller profits on a given product, if it was so desired, and they have been permitted to cut rates on standard goods—even going so far as to lower the price on only a limited number of a given article, to lure buyers—and advertise the fact broadcast, and the original manufacturer has been helpless to curb the ever-increasing practice. Latterly, general opinion has undergone reversal in the matter, and the makers of standard commodities are, for the most part, now coöperating to end this evil, which has also proved monopolistic in its influence, ruining thousands of the little independent retailers throughout the country.

This widespread reaction has resulted in bringing before Congress the Stephens-Ashurst bill, mentioned previously, which is designed to end the indis-

criminate use of price cutting and "to protect the public against dishonest advertising and false pretenses in merchandising." It purposes that the grower, producer, or manufacturer shall have the right to set the retail prices upon their productions, and that these prices shall be maintained everywhere alike, except in specified instances, as when a retailer decides for good cause to sell out his stock, go into bankruptcy, or declare the commodity in question defective. Reduction in the set cost may then be warranted, but in every case the maker or original producer must be notified or consulted, so that permission may be obtained for cutting the price for any cause whatever. Furthermore, as a safeguard, the Stephens-Ashurst bill expressly prohibits the manufacturers, in their turn, from forming themselves into any kind of combination to force prices beyond reason and precedent, or to seek control of the market.

All of which does not interfere with real bargains, we are glad to say, which are entirely different from the cut-rate methods in question. Bargains may be as mad or merry as ever before, but price maintenance on standardized articles must be made a matter for serious and full consideration. The supreme court of Washington differentiates clearly and effectively between the proper competition and predatory price cutting, as follows:

"The true competition is between rival articles, a competition in excellence, which can never be maintained if, through the perfidy of the retailer who cuts prices for his ulterior purposes, the manufacturer is forced to compete in prices with goods of his own production, while the retailer recoups his losses on the cut price by the sale of other articles, at, or above, their reasonable price. It is a fallacy to assume that the price cutter pockets the loss. The public makes it up on other purchases. The manufacturer alone is injured, except as the public is also injured through the manufacturer's inability, in the face of cut prices, to maintain the excellence of his product. Fixing the price on all brands of high-grade flour is a very different thing from fixing the price on one brand of high-grade flour. The one means destruction of all competition and of all incentive to increased excellence. The other means heightened competition and intensified incentive to increased excellence. It will not do to say that the manufacturer has not interests to protect by contract in the goods after he has sold them. They are personally identified and morally guaranteed by his mark and his advertisement."

D. E. W.

Stronger Than a Mother's Instinct

IN the scale of mother love, tradition proves that one must figure by inverse ratio. The poorer the mother, the greater the sacrifices she is willing to make. Where there is luxury, there are few children—and still fewer sacrifices.

That is what tradition asserts. And there are millions of living proofs of that assertion. All the more reason to gasp at the statement made recently by a physician in one of the larger maternity hospitals in the East.

Among the ward patients, in this and other lying-in institutions, great caution has to be employed in keeping watch on the new mothers, especially those of foreign extraction, who have several other children and a poverty-stricken home to return to.

It has been found that, in several instances, these women have deliberately rolled over on their helpless babies, with the intention of snuffing out the

flickering little lives. Are we to question the veracity of tradition? Or is there a possible explanation to this horrible situation? Mother love has been much press-agented—but very seldom overestimated.

The drudging, poverty-saturated woman accepts each new hardship and burden with a sullen doggedness that amounts almost to coma. Her body slaves; her brain is anæsthetized. In the hospital, after the birth of her baby, her body is at rest. The routine of labor is canceled for the time. The dormant brain rouses itself.

She has *time* to think. With thought, comes the realization that what was a hell-ridden existence will be even more horrible now, with a new mouth to feed, a new body to clothe. The awakened brain, tortured by the new strain put upon it, twists, for the moment. In that instant the mother tries to do away with the latest hardship.

She flies in the face of tradition.

A. W.

Beans a Boon

UNTIL recently we had always looked upon beans primarily as the ball bearings upon which Boston, the intellectual hub of the universe, revolves. Their only other use, we thought, was among less cultured people as a mere food. But now we learn that the humble bean is destined to play a very important part in the stamping out of a much-dreaded disease.

In a brief account in the June AINSLEE'S of the heroes of the public-health service, through an unfortunate error, we included among the names of those who have lost their lives fighting typhoid that of Joseph Goldberger. Surgeon Goldberger, happily for humanity, is still very much alive. Through his careful studies in the South, he has discovered not only how to cure, but also how to prevent, pellagra. The whole thing sums itself up in the word "beans," pellagra being due to a lopsided diet, which may be corrected by a ration containing more nitrogen. Simple and unexciting as it sounds, when we consider that there were at least seventy-five thousand cases of pellagra, with seven thousand five hundred deaths, in the United States during the last year, the magnitude of Surgeon Goldberger's work becomes apparent.

R. R. W.



Talks With Ainslee's Readers

THE next issue of AINSLEE's will contain the first installment of a new four-part novel by May Edington, entitled: "The Woman Who Broke the Rule." You will find it every bit as striking, every bit as entertaining, as "He That Is Without Sin," the story concluded in this present number.

The complete novelette for September, "The Golden Idiot," relates the romantic adventures of a whimsical New Yorker, who, in search of his better self, goes broad-highwaying it up Long Island Sound. A three-legged fox-terrier pup, Pod, which is short for Tripod, is his constant companion and adviser. A seductive Spanish dancer in a little Bronx road house, an absent-minded old etymologist, a cynical woman of the world with almond-shaped eyes the color of petrified wood, Jeffery Jarvis, the novelist, and, of course, the golden-haired heroine herself, all have their part in hindering or helping the hero in his quest.

There is much talk at present concerning "birth control." We have seen no more appealing answer to the advocates of this reform than a beautiful little prose poem of a story by Bonnie R. Ginger called "His Chance." A little boy and his dog, tired of waiting to be called from Unborn Land, come down to earth seeking mothers. But it is no more possible to convey the fragrance of the story in this department than it would be to scoop up and take home in a bucket some beautiful reflection on the surface of a forest pool. You will find "His Chance" in AINSLEE's for September.

Goldie, the philosophical young lady

of the switchboard, whose breezy letters you have been reading in "The Line's Busy," at last comes into her own. "Flowers for Goldie" is the name of the yarn in which she finally reaps her well-deserved reward.

No author of short stories writes with more delicacy and charm than does Gordon Arthur Smith. In this present number, you have read his delightful comedy, "His Duchess." In the September number, he changes to a minor key. "The Radiant One" tells of the supreme moment in the life of one of Paris' forgotten favorites. We especially commend this story to those reviewers of fiction who seem to consider crudity of style and brutality of theme essential to strength.

SPEAKING of this number, doesn't it strike you that Atkinson Kimball's "Skin Deep" is much more than merely an amusing little story? We published it primarily, of course, because it is entertaining. But isn't it also a much-needed dig at all the little theorists and reformers who are filling the country with their "isms" and "ologies?"

We have all seen little boys dancing out in front of a great procession, pretending to themselves that they are leading it. Sometimes, thinking that the line of march is down a certain street, they turn, only to find that the procession is going straight on. Then they have to rush and scramble to catch up. Sometimes these ragamuffins guess the right route, and as the procession turns into the side street after them, they strut and throw out their little

chests, half believing that they have actually dictated the line of march.

Aren't a good many of these present-day reformers like those street gamins? Is the route of the great procession of civilization in any way influenced by the antics and capers of these little fellows out in front? Don't you think that in some cases, at least, the real progressives may be the soldiers who keep step and march in the ranks?

We have hopes that the underlying significance of Mr. Kimball's entertaining story may give you some suggestion for a contribution to the editorial department we have added to AINSLEE'S.

TWO years ago a fragile old lady in black stood at a Paris window. In the street below, bands were playing the "Marseillaise" and people were waving flags. The rhythmic tramp of thousands of feet echoed from wall to wall of the highway. France's army was setting forth to war against the invading German hosts. The aged woman pointed a trembling forefinger at the endless lines of marching soldiers and cried, in hysterical triumph: "This shall be my revenge!"

The old lady in black was Eugénie Maria Ignace Augustina de Montijo Bonaparte, once Empress of the French.

Albert Payson Terhune has chosen her as the subject for the next of his "Stories of the Super-women." As the *New York Evening Post* says, in its literary section, these stories are always entertaining. You will find the one dealing with Eugénie particularly so. Incidentally, she is the only one

of Mr. Terhune's super-women who is still living.

Twenty-nine of these super-women have now been introduced to readers of AINSLEE'S, and while the secret of their charm must always remain as much a mystery as ever, it is interesting to look back and consider in a general way what traits the majority of these fascinating ladies possessed in common.

Age, it would seem, makes little difference. Madame Jumel, Récamier, Ninon de Lenclos, and Cleopatra, all exercised their power well on past youth.

Wit, however, appears to be a distinct handicap. George Sand, Lady Blessington, Nell Gwyn, and Peg Woffington are the only ones we find favored with nimble minds.

Bad temper seems a much more characteristic trait, Cleopatra, Sand, Lola Montez, Montespan, Poppæa, and Pompadour being among those who were not accustomed to count twenty before making reply.

Virtue, we regret to say, seems pretty well confined to Elizabeth Patterson and Madame Récamier. Many more were tragic than were gay; and we find super-women blessed with red hair out of all proportion to the population of the world at large—Cleopatra, Du Barry, Lucrezia Borgia, Montespan, and Mary Queen of Scots among others.

As we have said, the mystery of the super-woman's charm will probably never be solved. But in the meantime, let us beware of elderly, red-headed ladies with bad tempers, no brains, and tragic eyes.



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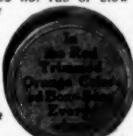
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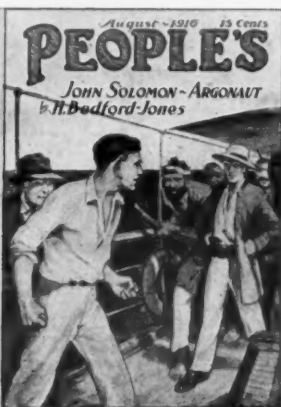
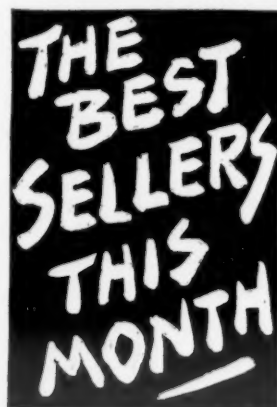
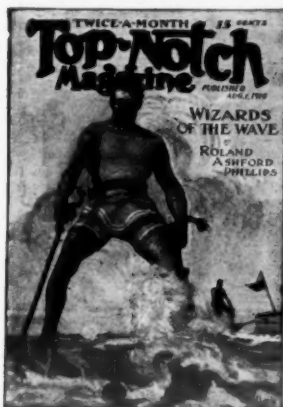
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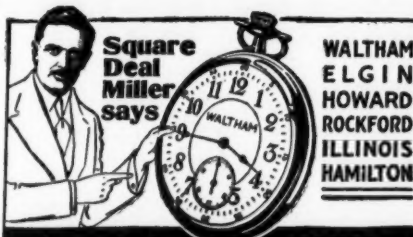
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